

Byzantine Melitene and the Social Milieu of the Syriac Renaissance

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On the verso of folio 282 of the Edessa–Aleppo Codex, the only surviving Syriac manuscript of the great world chronicle of Michael the Syrian, in the lower-left corner, is a small block of text offset by a thin, gently undulating border of red ink. The extract begins in medias res:

He was exceedingly angry, and he ordered that either they should hand it over, or get out of their homes. Then many honored and famous men went out and were scattered in the cities of the Jazira and in all of Syria. And in every place they settled, they built churches, and adorned splendid monasteries. Among them were these praiseworthy and virtuous men who were in Melitene, who were called the sons of Abū 'Imrān, and of whom many splendid things are spoken, in respect of their righteous way of life.¹

Here we have a puzzle: we do not know who is giving these commands or what he wished these “honored and famous men” to hand over. None of the surrounding material in the chronicle provides an explanation. The extract’s primary focus, however, is clearly on the clan of Abū ‘Imrān, and its larger part is dedicated to

Patriarche jacobite d'Antioche (1166–1199), 4 vols. (Paris, 1899–1910) (hereafter, Chabot). I will reference the page of the Edessa–Aleppo codex facsimile, then Chabot’s facsimile, then Chabot’s accompanying French translation; thus, the above quotation is Michael the Syrian, 563 = Chabot 4:560; [trans.] 3:145–46; there is now a very useful English translation of the entirety of Michael’s *Chronicle*, which I have sometimes consulted as I made my own translations: M. Moosa, trans. *The Syriac Chronicle of Michael the Rabo (The Great): A Universal History from the Creation* (Teaneck, NJ, 2014). A word on transliteration: I have prioritized clarity and accessibility rather than purity. This means that I have opted to anglicize names and proper nouns as much as possible in order to reduce the inevitable friction introduced by shutting between Greek, Syriac, and Arabic sources; in those cases where transliteration was necessary, I have adopted the Library of Congress standards for Greek and Syriac and the IJMES system for Arabic in accordance with the editorial guidelines of *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*. In those cases where names are not easily anglicized, I have chosen to hellenize Greek names but not fully transliterate them and to latinize Syriac names; only Arabic names will be fully transliterated. This is designed to make it easier to consult the different bodies of scholarship associated with these languages, which have very different transliteration habits. The one point on which I am deliberately inconsistent is in the rendering of the name John. There are a large number of Johns to keep track of in this article, and in the interests of keeping them as distinct as possible, I have chosen to anglicize Greek Johns but transliterate Syriac and Arabic Johns.

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The passage concludes with a brief explanation for its inclusion in the text: "These few things we have written down, from among the many things which are said about them, that all who read it might praise God, and pray on their behalf."⁴ The West Syrian tradition of historical writing, unlike its Greek counterpart, was a virtual monopoly of the Syrian Orthodox clergy. The resulting chronicles are notably reticent on the affairs of the Syrian Orthodox laity, about whom we are consequently not well informed.⁵ But, as Dorothea Weltecke has put it, "there once had also been a lay culture."⁶ This passage is therefore unusual for providing detailed

It seems appropriate to take up the invited metaphor, for the subject of this article is the marginal and mutilated history of the Syrian Orthodox in Melitene and the border regions, after the Byzantine reconquest and before the advent of Turkish dominion. By reexamining the evidence of the relevant chronicles and introducing new evidence from some underutilized sources, I hope to further the reconstruction of a confessionally mixed and prosperous society on the Byzantine eastern frontier. I will further argue that far from being marginal, this frontier society was central to both the political economy of the Middle Byzantine Empire and the cultural,

3 **مهيلا** Michael the Syrian, 563 = Chabot, 4:560; [trans.] 3:146. Clearly this just means “a very great deal of gold.”

5 D. Weltecke, *Die "Beschreibung der Zeiten" von Mōr Michael dem Grossen (1126–1199): Eine Studie zu ihrem historischen und historiographiegeschichtlichen Kontext* (Leuven, 2003), 20–53; idem, "Michael the Syrian and Syriac Orthodox Identity," in *Religious Origins of Nations? The Christian Communities of the Middle East*, ed. R. B. ter Haar Romeny (Leiden, 2010), 115–25; M. Debié, "Syriac Historiography and Identity Formation," in Romeny, *Religious Origins*, 93–114; M. Debié, *L'écriture de l'histoire en syriaque: Transmissions interculturelles et constructions identitaires entre hellénisme et islam* (Leuven, 2015), 132–37.

8 The classic format for Michael's *Chronicle* is three parallel columns, with one column recounting secular and political history, another recounting church history, and a third recounting prodigies or natural disasters: Weltecke, *Beschreibung*, 163–78. In the three columns that begin under the rubric for this section, the secular column celebrates the accession and martial exploits of the emperor John I Tzimiskes, before specifying that he used to live in the region of Melitene and places associated with him may still be seen there; the ecclesiastical column recounts the accessions of a new Coptic Orthodox patriarch of Alexandria and a new Syrian Orthodox patriarch of Antioch, before turning immediately to the accession of a new Syrian Orthodox metropolitan of Melitene; and the column on prodigies and natural disasters provides a generic notice on an earthquake before recounting an arresting anecdote about extreme August winds in the region of Melitene that blew significant quantities of wheat off the threshing floors and into the Euphrates. To say that the affairs of Melitene dominate the narrative at this point is not an exaggeration: Michael the Syrian, 557–60 = Chabot, 4:557–60; [trans.] 3:132–37.

9 Michael the Syrian, 563 = Chabot, 4:560; [trans.] 3:145 n. 6.

artistic, and literary revival among the Syrian Orthodox, now known as the Syriac Renaissance. Chronologically, my argument begins with the Byzantine capture of Melitene in 934 and runs until September 1039, when the *synodos endēmousa* convened in Constantinople by Patriarch Alexios the Studite (r. 1025–1043) released a decree condemning intermarriage between the Syrian Orthodox population of Melitene and their Chalcedonian neighbors. My reconstruction of the history of the Syrian Orthodox community of Melitene in this hundred-year span relies primarily (though by no means exclusively) on six crucial primary sources. The first is Michael the Syrian's *Chronicle*, more specifically the portion largely derived from the earlier work of Ignatius of Melitene (fl. 1050–1100), and which recounts the period of Byzantine rule in remarkably sanguine tones. The second is a synodical letter (in Arabic) written by the Syrian Orthodox patriarch of Antioch Yūḥanān VII Srīgteh (r. 965–985) and addressed to the Coptic patriarch of Alexandria Mīnā II (r. 956–974), in which Yūḥanān complains of his treatment at the hands of Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963–969), who had imprisoned him after the breakdown of coerced theological disputations. The next three sources recount the events of the Constantinopolitan trial, deposition, and exile of the Syrian Orthodox patriarch of Antioch Yūḥanān VIII Bar Abdūn (r. 1004–1031) under the aegis of Emperor Romanos III Argyros (r. 1028–1034) and Patriarch Alexios the Studite. The first is a Syriac *vita cum passione* of Yūḥanān Bar Abdūn that has been embedded in Michael's *Chronicle* and whose authorship cannot be determined with any certainty. The second is a miniature *vita cum passione* of Yūḥanān Bar Abdūn written by Michael of Tinnīs (fl. 1000–1051?) in the pages of the Arabic *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church* on the basis of information he had gathered on a visit to Melitene. The third is the Greek synodal decree produced by the Constantinopolitan *synodos endēmousa* that confirmed Yūḥanān Bar Abdūn's deposition and clarified the mandate for that deposition in the canon law. This leaves one further crucial primary source, with which my argument will conclude: the synodal decree issued by the *synodos endēmousa* in September 1039 that attacked intermarriage between the Syrian Orthodox and the Chalcedonians in Melitene.

Methodologically, the argument demands some delicate footwork, because the existing traditions of scholarship on this topic have generally inscribed

themselves within the same horizons as the writers of their sources. It will thus be necessary to bring into dialogue two strands of scholarship that have often failed to communicate with each other: scholarship within the tradition of Byzantine Studies on the governance of the eastern frontier after the tenth century conquests, and scholarship within Near Eastern Studies on the Syriac Renaissance. The former has generally focused on administrative, fiscal, and military questions regarding the imperial management of ethnic and religious minorities on the Byzantine Empire's eastern border.¹⁰ Although it has now integrated information from Syriac and Arabic chroniclers like Michael the Syrian and Yahyā of Antioch, this scholarship essentially adopts the view from Constantinople, seeking to explain how imperial policy emanating from the capital failed or succeeded in profitably integrating reconquered territory and populations into the empire's political economy. The latter body of scholarship, by contrast, has primarily sought to chart the intellectual and ecclesiastical history of the Syrian Orthodox during the eleventh to thirteenth century, when the community experienced a burst of literary production and creativity. In keeping with its sources, this work concentrates on the concerns of literate clergymen within the Syrian Orthodox community.¹¹ A significant part

10 Key works include G. Dagron, "Minorités ethniques et religieuses dans l'Orient byzantin à la fin du X^e siècle et au XI^e siècle: L'immigration syrienne," *TM* 6 (1976): 177–216; N. Oikonomides, "L'organisation de la frontière orientale de Byzance aux X^e–XI^e siècles et le Taktikon de l'Escorial," in *Actes du XIV^e congrès international des études byzantines, Bucarest, 6–12 September 1971*, vol. 1, ed. M. Berza and E. Stănescu (Bucharest, 1971), 285–302; J.-C. Cheynet, "Les limites du pouvoir à Byzance: Une forme de tolérance?" in *Toleration and Repression in the Middle Ages: In Memory of Lenos Mavromatis*, ed. K. Nikolaou (Athens, 2002), 15–28; J.-C. Cheynet, "The Duchy of Antioch during the Second Period of Byzantine Rule," in *East and West in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean I: Antioch from the Byzantine Reconquest until the End of the Crusader Principality*, ed. K. Ciggaar and M. Metcalf (Leuven, 2006), 1–16; J. Howard-Johnston, "Crown Lands and the Defence of Imperial Authority in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," *ByzF* 21 (1995): 76–99; J. Shepard, "Constantine VII, Caucasian Openings and the Road to Aleppo," in *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium*, ed. A. Eastmond (Farnham, 2001), 19–40; C. Holmes, "'How the East Was Won' in the Reign of Basil II," in *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium* (Farnham, 2001), 41–56; and Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976–1025)* (Oxford, 2005), 41–56.

11 Key works include the articles collected in *The Syriac Renaissance*, ed. H. Teule, C. F. Tauwinkler, R. B. ter Haar Romeny, and J. van Ginkel (Leuven, 2010); A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen*

of the argument that follows depends on compelling these two bodies of scholarship to “talk” to one another. I hope that my contribution will spur further dialogue between these two traditions of inquiry.¹²

The larger argument of the article will proceed in three stages, each of which yields its own important conclusion. The first stage is a reexamination of the evidence for the early history of the Syrian Orthodox population of Melitene under Byzantine rule. The key conclusion here is that the secondary scholarship has placed undue stress on a single passage from Michael’s *Chronicle* in reconstructing the history of the Syrian immigration. This passage provides an origin story for Syrian Orthodox Melitene, which it depicts as the result of a formal agreement between Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas and Patriarch Yūḥanān VII Srīgteh, granting them an official guarantee of tolerance—but only on the condition that the Syrian Orthodox patriarch of Antioch relocate to Melitene permanently. The influence of Gilbert Dagron’s seminal 1976 article on “l’immigration syrienne” has been decisive in this regard, as most scholars have accepted his proposal that the passage discloses a

“dual policy” by Nikephoros and his imperial successors: tolerance in Melitene, intolerance in Antioch.¹³ Yet when read against the evidence of Yūḥanān VII Srīgteh’s synodical letter to Mīnā II, this narrative appears less and less plausible. The explanation for this crucial passage lies with its probable author, Ignatius of Melitene. Ignatius was a native of the city who was well integrated into the Byzantine Empire and was conversant in Greek. His story of a formal agreement stamped with an imperial seal follows the pattern of his Chalcedonian contemporaries, who frequently sought formal guarantees of exactly this kind. Under the pressure of this new evidence, Dagron’s theory of a dual policy crumbles, forcing us to reckon with a Syrian Orthodox community that was much better integrated into the empire than we had previously appreciated. The second stage is a synthetic examination of the three major sources for the trial and deposition of Yūḥanān Bar Abdūn, which brought a long period of informal tolerance to an end. The key conclusion of this section is that the trial was undertaken against the objections of many highly placed figures in the Chalcedonian patriarchate of Antioch, as well as the secular hierarchy of both Antioch and Melitene. This serves to highlight a concern among some members of the secular administration that Melitene’s role as a source of enormous revenues should not be disrupted; it also highlights the tensions that appear to have been emerging between the Constantinopolitan and Antiochene patriarchates. The third and final stage pursues this revelation into the Greek text of the synodal decrees of 1030 and 1039, the sophisticated legal reasoning of which marks a significant departure from what had come before. The key conclusion here is that this increasing sophistication was at least partly a response to “tolerant dissidents,” who appear to have been concentrated in the Chalcedonian patriarchate of Antioch. These decrees were consciously attempting to close any legal loopholes through which the practical realities of cross-confessional tolerance and inter-confessional marriage might pass unsanctioned. Yet, as is so often the case, the evidence suggests that the persecuting initiatives of Alexios the Studite had relatively little success in curbing the confessionally promiscuous habits of Byzantine Melitene. Taken as a whole, the new picture is remarkably consistent with the evidence from the sixth to seventh century, the last time that the Syrian Orthodox community found itself

Literatur (Bonn, 1922), 285–86, 290, 295, 326; P. Kawerau, *Die jakobitische Kirche im Zeitalter der syrischen Renaissance: Idee und Wirklichkeit* (Berlin, 1960); J. Leroy, “La renaissance de l’église syriacque aux XII^e–XIII^e siècles,” *CahCM* 14 (1971): 131–48, 239–55; A. Palmer, “Charting Undercurrents in the History of the West-Syrian People: The Resettlement of Byzantine Melitene after 934,” *OC* 70 (1986): 37–68; H. Takahashi, *Barhebraeus: A Bio-Bibliography* (Piscataway, NJ, 2005), 1–119; Weltecke, *Beschreibung*, 1–6, 54–126; idem, “On the Syriac Orthodox in the Principality of Antioch during the Crusader Period,” in Ciggaar and Metcalf, *East and West in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean*, 95–124; idem, “60 Years After Peter Kawerau: Remarks on the Social and Cultural History of Syriac-Orthodox Christians from the XIth to the XIIIth Century,” *Le Muséon* 121.3–4 (2008): 311–35; and idem, “Syrian Orthodox Identity,” 115–25.

12 At present, the most sustained and comprehensive efforts to integrate Greek, Syriac, and Arabic evidence, and to bridge the divide between Byzantine Studies, Syriac Studies, and Islamic Studies within the scholarship on this place and period, are the matchless regional studies by Bernd Andreas Vest and Klaus-Peter Todt. Vest, *Geschichte*, is an incredibly rich and detailed study of Melitene and its environs; K.-P. Todt, *Dukat und griechisch-orthodoxes Patriarchat von Antiocheia in mittelbyzantinischer Zeit (969–1084)* (Wiesbaden, 2020) is a broad-ranging analysis of the history of Antioch and its hinterland in the period of the Byzantine reconquest. They have combined their efforts in a comprehensive recent survey of Syria as part of the *Tabula imperii byzantini* series: K.-P. Todt and B. A. Vest, *Syria (Syria Prôtē, Syria Deutera, Syria Euphratēsia)*, 3 vols., *TIB* 15.1–3 (Vienna, 2014).

13 Dagron, “L’immigration syrienne,” 207.

living in a Chalcedonian Empire. Consequently, I bring my argument to a close by underlining the extent to which imperial Chalcedonian persecution of the Syrian Orthodox had always maintained the same irregular, “stop and start” character. I also push back against the habit of narrating the history of the Syrian Orthodox community in Byzantium as a threnody for a forever deteriorating relationship. In the event, that relationship, while troubled, seems to have been oddly homeostatic. It was only after the advent of Arab and later Turkish dominion that it was seen—always retrospectively—as necessarily doomed.

“L’immigration syrienne” (934–1025)

Any attempt to reconstruct the social composition of the Byzantine eastern frontier must begin with Dagron’s article on “l’immigration syrienne.” Relying primarily on the histories of John Skylitzes and Leo the Deacon, and the chronicles of Michael the Syrian, Bar Hebraeus, and the Melkite Arab Yaḥyā of Antioch, Dagron revealed an imperial policy that explicitly encouraged the immigration of Syrian Orthodox Christians into the conquered territories of the former raiding emirates. In Dagron’s narrative of this process, the crucial moment came during the reign of Nikephoros II Phokas, who, on the advice of unnamed advisers, invited the Syrian Orthodox patriarch of Antioch, Yūḥanān VII Srīgteh, to establish a permanent seat in Melitene. The patriarch agreed on condition of an imperial guarantee of tolerance for the religious practice of the Syrian Orthodox. The emperor’s approval was forthcoming, and a guarantee of tolerance was stamped with the emperor’s own seal. The patriarch, sufficiently assured of the emperor’s good intentions, then took up residence in the newly constructed monastery of Barid.¹⁴

Dagron’s account of this episode is based primarily on two columns of evidence, drawn from the chronicles of Yaḥyā of Antioch and Michael the Syrian, respectively. The first is Yaḥyā’s account of the devastation of much of the Jazīra during the Byzantine reconquest. Yaḥyā’s rendering of the Byzantine campaigns against Sayf al-Dawla in the 950s and 960s, which broke Hamdanid power and brought the age of the raiding emirates to a close,

is attended by vivid descriptions of agricultural wastage and general destruction.¹⁵ Melitene and its environs had by this point long since been in Byzantine hands; they were captured in 934 by the *domestikos* John Kourkouas during the reign of Emperor Romanos I Lakapenos (r. 920–944).¹⁶ Kourkouas had forced the inhabitants of the city to either convert to Christianity or face expulsion, but as the Byzantine reconquest progressed over the following century, the policies emanating from Constantinople became notably less strict and more creative with respect to the newly subject populations.¹⁷ While by no means beyond the range of Sayf al-Dawla’s annual raids during these decades, Melitene was not exposed to the full impact of the scorched-earth tactics employed by the Byzantine army against the Hamdanid territories centered on Aleppo.¹⁸ An arresting passage in

15 Yaḥyā of Antioch, *History* (I. Kratchkovsky and A. Vasiliev, “Histoire de Yahya-Ibn-Sa’id d’Antioche, Continuateur de Sa’id-Ibn-Bitriq,” *PO* 18.5 [1924]: 699–823 and *PO* 23.3 (1932): 349–520; F. Micheau and G. Troupeau, “Histoire de Yahya-Ibn-Sa’id d’Antioche, Continuateur de Sa’id-Ibn-Bitriq,” *PO* 47.4 (1997): 374–559; hereafter “Yaḥyā”); Dagron, “L’immigration syrienne,” 181; and see Holmes, “How the East,” 42–43. For some useful reevaluations of the strategic picture in these years, see W. Garrood, “The Byzantine Conquest of Cilicia and the Hamdanids of Aleppo, 959–965,” *AnatSt* 58 (2008): 127–40; idem, “The Illusion of Continuity: Nikephoros Phokas, John Tzimiskes, and the Eastern Border,” *BMGS* 37.1 (2013): 20–34. For a new general narrative, see A. Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A.D. to the First Crusade* (Oxford, 2017), 21–42. Still useful are the narratives in M. Canard, *Histoire de la dynastie des Hamdanides de Jazīra et de Syrie* (Algiers, 1951), 805–27, and M. Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium* (Berkeley, 1996), 310–57. On the “end game” of this process, see W. Farag, “The Aleppo Question: A Byzantine-Fatimid Conflict of Interests in Northern Syria in the Later Tenth Century A.D.,” *BMGS* 14.1 (1990): 44–59 (I am indebted to Lucas McMahon for this reference).

16 Theophanes Continuatus (I. Bekker, ed., *Theophanes Continuatus*, CSHB [Bonn, 1838], 416–17); see the remarks of Holmes, *Basil II*, 374–76.

17 The definitive account is now Holmes, *Basil II*, 299–392; see also Whittow, *Making*, 317–57.

18 Chapters 63 to 65 in the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos provide a vivid picture of the type of warfare involved: chapter 63 gives advice on how to raid enemy territory without being caught by a responding force and specifically identifies the burning of crops and the taking of captives as the main goal of this activity; chapter 64 gives advice on what to do if given battle in a mountain pass or on the march (presumably most likely to occur when returning to the interior of Asia Minor after a successful raid); chapter 65 gives advice on how to besiege and capture a city or fortress that has already been weakened by the devastation of its rural hinterland:

14 Dagron, “L’immigration syrienne,” 186–88; Todt and Vest, *Syria*, 15.2.953–56.

This passage remains crucial to our understanding of the Syrian Orthodox settlement of Melitene. This is a problem, because on closer examination, certain elements of the story do not make a great deal of sense.²²

First, we must note that the exhaustive studies of Bernd Andreas Vest on the history of Melitene seriously complicate this clean and simple origin story for the Syrian Orthodox population of the city. By making a careful inventory of all available sources of evidence (though these are still derived primarily from the Syriac chronicle tradition), Vest has illuminated a process of immigration best understood as taking place in three stages. The first is a slow, thinly documented but clearly perceptible influx of Syrian Orthodox immigrants into Melitene after its capture in 934. The most important source of evidence for this process, as is generally the case with Syrian Orthodox Melitene, are the foundation dates of new churches, convents, and monasteries.²³ The second wave comes in the mid-to-late 960s, when

שם זה לא חסר-הוּמָא מַחְבֵּר, הַלְתִּימָא וְלֹא מַחְבֵּר כְּחַבְרָא, עַד שֶׁנֶּחֱפִיז: [חכ] חֲמִישֶׁה וְעַלְכָּא זָקֵן וְהוּא מַחְבֵּר. אֲנִיכְךָ בְּלִילָא מִשְׁכַּח טַלְמוּדָא דְּכֵן, מַחְבֵּר לְזָקֵן. סָרָא יַחַד מַחְבֵּר וְנִשְׁמַע מִי פֻלְגִיתָא[חכ] מַחְבֵּרָא בְּחִיטְרָא, וַיַּיַּחַד אֲנִיכְכָּא וְהוּא מַחְבֵּרָא. לִבְנֵי מַחְבֵּר הֵם חֲבִירָא מִזְעִים דְּעָלָא חֲבֵרָא כֵּן. מוֹרָאֵן. וְהִנֵּה וְעַמְלָא Michael the Syrian, 559 = Chabot, 4:556; [trans.] 3:130. The story also appears in Bar Hebraeus's *Ecclesiastical Chronicle* (ed. J.-B. Abbeloos and T. J. Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon ecclesiasticum*, vol. 1 [Leuven, 1872], 411; hereafter, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*) and in the *Chronicle of 1234* (J.-B. Chabot, ed., *Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad annum 1234 pertinens*, CSCO 82 [Leuven, 1920], 281; hereafter, *Chronicle of 1234*). However, the former seems to derive directly from Michael's account, and the latter probably derives from the lost chronicle of Ignatius of Melitene, so neither has any substantial independent value for the questions I am pursuing here. On Bar Hebraeus's dependence on Michael for his narrative at this point, see the remarks of D. Wilmshurst in Bar Hebraeus, *The Ecclesiastical Chronicle* (D. Wilmshurst, trans. [Piscataway, NJ, 2016], xvi–xviii; xxvii–xl). On the independent derivation of information from the lost chronicle of Ignatius of Melitene in the *Chronicle of 1234*, see A. Hilkenes, *The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle of 1234 and Its Sources* (Leiden, 2018), 293–304.

22 Substantive discussions of this passage and its implications in Dagron, “L’immigration syrienne,” 187–88; T. H. Benner, “Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche unter byzantinischer Herrschaft im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert” (PhD diss., University of Marburg, 1989), 25–34; Vest, *Geschichte*, 2:1077–1107.

23 Vest, *Geschichte*, 2:925–28, 1026–42. Dagron (“L’immigration syrienne,” 192–93) acknowledges this first wave but consciously downplays its significance in comparison to what followed in the reign of Nikephoros. E. Honigmann, *Le couvent de Baršaumā et le patriarcat jacobite d’Antioche et de Syrie*, CSCO 146 (Leuven, 1954), 47–54, 93, 106–7.

there is indeed an upsurge in new foundations.²⁴ The immigration coincident with Yūḥanān VII's change of residence late in the reign of Nikephoros Phokas undoubtedly marked an acceleration, but it is unclear whether it should be understood as a dramatic refoundation. Even if Nikephoros did come to some kind of explicit arrangement with the patriarch, it was probably because he could recognize the fiscal opportunity presented by an already existing population of the Syrian Orthodox in Melitene, and thus encouraged further immigration.²⁵ This second, more intensive movement of the Syrian Orthodox into the area in the 960s was followed by a third in the 990s, when there seems to have been an influx of former inhabitants of Tikrit and its environs. It is to this third phase of immigration that the clan of Abū 'Imrān traces its origins in the city.²⁶ The passage in Michael's *Chronicle* thus presents a picture that is far too neat to match up with more fine-grained sources of evidence.²⁷ The corresponding passage in the *Chronicle to 1234*, which probably derives independently from the same source used by Michael, makes the chronological issues more explicit: "[this was] because they [the Byzantines] had only recently taken [these regions] from the Arabs."²⁸ In the case of Melitene, at least, we know that the Byzantines had not taken it as "recently" as all that; it had hardly been lying empty and desolate for lack of settlers.

24 The overwhelming majority of this evidence is still derived from Michael's *Chronicle*: Vest, *Geschichte*, 2:1077–1107, with specific discussion of the passage in question at 1087–93; Dagron, “L’immigration syrienne,” 188–92.

25 There is a suggestive passage in the secular *Chronicle* of Bar Hebraeus, situated in the year 963, in which Nikephoros—who in the previous pages is associated with widespread destruction and the burning of crops and villages—passes through the hinterland of Aleppo with great care to cause no destruction, telling the local farmers not to neglect the tillage of the land because it belongs to the Romans now and they will soon return to take possession: Bar Hebraeus, *Chronicle* (ed. P. Bejan, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Syriacum, emendatum adnotationibusque locupletatum* [Paris, 1890], 187; hereafter, *Chronicon Syriacum*).

26 Vest, *Geschichte*, 2:1139–62; Dagron, “L’immigration syrienne,” 193–94.

27 We should note that Dagron did have access to most of this evidence and that he deals with the problems it poses for the story of Nikephoros's agreement more through emphasis than through omission.

28 *Chronicle of 1234*, CSCO 82:28I. ﴿سنة ١٢٣٤ بعد انبؤ ص ٢٨﴾

29 The date derives from Yaḥyā, PO 18, 822–23. See also Skylitzes, *Synopsis of History* 14.17; Leo the Deacon, *History* 5.4; Kaldellis, *Streams*, 62–63; and Whittow, *Making*, 326–27.

29 The date derives from Yaḥyā, PO 18, 822–23. See also Skylitzes, *Synopsis of History* 14.17; Leo the Deacon, *History* 5.4; Kaldellis, *Streams*, 62–63; and Whittow, *Making*, 326–27.

30 Ibrāhīm b. Yūhannā, *Life of Christopher* (H. Zayat, ed. and trans., “Vie du patriarche melkite d’Antioche Christophore [d. 967] par le protospathaire Ibrāhīm b. Yuhanna: Document inédit du X^e siècle,” *PrOC* 2 [1952]: 11–38; 333–66). Given that the most likely candidates for the time of composition fall near or within the patriarchal tenure of Nicholas II (r. 1025–1030), who was opposed to the persecuting measures taken by Alexios the Studite, one might suppose that Ibrāhīm consciously suppressed any information about similar persecuting measures taken by Christopher. The bluntest rejoinder to this supposition is also the most compelling: Christopher is unlikely to have had any time or political capital to spend on such measures in a context of extreme political disorder, which at one point forced him to withdraw to the monastery of Simeon the Stylite at Qal’at Sim’ān, and which eventually claimed his life; see J. Mugler, “A Martyr with Too Many Causes: Christopher of Antioch (d. 967) and Local Collective Memory” (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2019). Nor does Ibrāhīm b. Yūhannā appear to have been personally opposed to a policy of persecution, as he should probably (though not certainly) be identified with Abraham the *mystikos* and *protospatharios*

Third, and finally, we have the awkward problem that if Nikephoros did make such an agreement, he broke his word almost immediately. The very next passage in Michael's *Chronicle* refers to the deportation of the patriarch and many of his metropolitans to Constantinople, where they engaged in extended theological debates with the emperor and patriarch and were pressured to capitulate to Chalcedonian orthodoxy.³¹ Michael's *Chronicle* explicitly depicts this as a broken promise, insisting that while Yūḥanān VII had fulfilled his end of the bargain, Nikephoros had not: "The patriarch carried out what the emperor sought in every detail. The emperor, however, did not abide by his promise."³² The story of the broken promise continues to inform received wisdom concerning these events in secondary scholarship. In the course of numerous debate sessions over a span of several months, beginning in April 969, the Syrian Orthodox remained steadfast in their confession and were subsequently imprisoned. But they were released after the coup of John I Tzimiskes (r. 969–976), who showed no interest

31 Michael the Syrian, 559–60 = Chabot, 4:556–57; [trans.] 3:130–31.

31 Michael the Syrian, 559–60 = Chabot, 4:556–57; [trans.] 3:130–31.

32 مَحْبُورٌ مَعَهُ فَيُطَاوِلُ حَتَّى يَحْكُمَ. اَلَا هُوَ حَكَمَ لَا مَحْ Michael the Syrian, 559 = Chabot, 4:556; [trans.] 3:130; both Bar Hebraeus's *Ecclesiastical Chronicle* and the *Chronicle of 1234* are likewise explicit that the emperor made a "promise" (all three sources use the quadriliteral root *ḥ-k-m*). However, Bar Hebraeus, who almost certainly draws on Michael's *Chronicle* for his information here, explicitly states that this promise consisted in a guarantee of tolerance authenticated by the emperor's seal: "and he took the emperor's seal to this effect" (مَعَهُ حَاتَمًا وَحَكَمًا): *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, 411. The *Chronicle of 1234*, by contrast, only states that Nikephoros promised to "honor the patriarch greatly" (أَكْرَمَهُ بِكُلِّ كَرَامَةٍ [ط] وَبِجَمْعٍ): CSCO 82:281. As the *Chronicle of 1234* drew on the lost chronicle of Ignatius directly, this means that we cannot foreclose on the possibility that it was *Michael*, not Ignatius, who first originated the story of Nikephoros guaranteeing tolerance with his seal. On balance I consider this the less likely option, but it cannot be ruled out decisively.

in any policy of persecution.³³ In many ways this is the real beginning of Syrian Orthodox Melitene's golden age, as neither John Tzimiskes nor Basil II is recorded as showing any personal interest in disturbing the peace of the Syrian Orthodox church. This third problem sums up and recapitulates the first two: everything is happening too fast. The obvious solution is to move the initial agreement between Nikephoros and Yūḥanān as far back in time as possible, to about 965.³⁴ This would at least make the "broken promise" narrative a little more intelligible, because Nikephoros would only have breached the terms of his supposed agreement after an interval of several years. But there is still little space for a campaign of persecution by the Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch with imperial endorsement. Dagron assumed that Yūḥanān's acceptance of the emperor's seal cemented a permanent imperial policy, or rather two policies: "There was no single policy of the emperor with respect to the Syrian Jacobites or the Armenian Monophysites, but rather at least two: a tolerant one in Melitene or Sebasteia, an intolerant one in Antioch."³⁵ This assumption looks increasingly shaky.

So it is worth trying to find the seal in question. Previous scholars have accepted almost unanimously the short phrase in this passage, "nsab 'ezaqtā d-malkā," as evidence of an imperial seal or even a chrysobull guaranteeing perpetual tolerance. T. H. Benner attempted a wholesale reconstruction, and Vest has speculated that Michael may have consulted the original document in the archives of Melitene.³⁶ If the emperor did provide a chrysobull assuring tolerance for the Syrian Orthodox church, whose guarantees he then violated shortly thereafter, it would be a rather remarkable thing. It would also be dramatically out of step with the content

of the small number of other chrysobulls that we can connect to Nikephoros, whose provisions deal largely with tax exemptions for the Athonite communities, and in one case an appointment to the Chalcedonian patriarchate of Antioch.³⁷ Consequently, if a sealed document or even a chrysobull had survived in the patriarchal archives at Melitene, it is surprising that Michael or another chronicler does not quote from it *in extenso* at some point. Michael was rather fond of highlighting the perfidy of the Greeks, so it is hard to imagine him passing up the opportunity to score some cheap points over a broken promise.³⁸ Still more would we expect Yūḥanān VII to mention it, if he ever had occasion to discuss his relations with the emperor Nikephoros in sympathetic company.

As a matter of fact, he did have such an occasion. A florilegium passed down through the manuscript tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church preserves an Arabic synodical letter from Yūḥanān VII to the Coptic patriarch of Alexandria, Mīnā II.³⁹ The title provided in the manuscript makes it clear that the context for the letter was the coercive theological disputations held by Nikephoros Phokas in 969:

Synodical letter of the chaste father Abba Yūḥannā, Patriarch of Antioch, to Abba Mīnā, Patriarch of Alexandria, at the time when the emperor of Rome disputed with and took captive Abba Yūḥannā, Patriarch of Antioch, and took him off to Constantinople, and

33 Vest (*Geschichte*, 2:1095–1103) plausibly places Yūḥanān's return to his seat in the spring of 970.

34 Dagron, "L'immigration syrienne," 187. Vest (*Geschichte*, 2:1087) provides the summer of 965 as the terminus post quem for the agreement, based on Yūḥanān's election to the patriarchate on July 9, 965; Kaldellis (*Streams*, 48) seems to place the meeting in 965 (though he is not completely explicit in his phrasing). For discussion on some of these chronological points, and on many others, I am deeply indebted to Bernd Andreas Vest.

35 "Il n'y a pas une politique de l'empereur à l'égard des Syriens jacobites ou des Arméniens monophysites, mais au moins deux: l'une tolérante à Mélitène ou à Sébaste, l'autre intolérante à Antioche." Dagron, "L'immigration syrienne," 207.

36 Benner, "Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche," 31–33; Vest, *Geschichte*, 2:1089–90.

37 F. Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565–1453*, vol. 1 (Hildesheim, 1976), 89–93. Note that Dölger simply refers to a *στυλλιον*, reflecting the Syriac, rather than a chrysobull—which has been assumed by some later scholarship. This is also true of Dagron, who cites Dölger at this point: Dagron, "L'immigration syrienne," 187 n. 51.

38 Weltecke, "Michael the Syrian," 120–21.

39 The text is available only in J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, 3 vols. (Rome, 1719–21), 2:133–40 (hereafter, *BOCV*). Assemani accepted the colophonic attribution of the manuscript to the famous Muslim convert to Christianity Būlus ibn Rajā' (fl. latter half of the tenth century), but Georg Graf demonstrated that this was in error. At present, no definite answer can be given as to the identity of the compiler, but there is no strong reason to doubt the letter's authenticity, and the internal details strengthen the case for accepting it as genuine. See G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. 2 (Vatican City, 1947–66), 318–19; idem, "Unechte Zeugnisse römischer Päpste für den Monophysitismus im arabischen Bekenntnis der Väter," *RQ* 42.3–4 (1928): 197–234; M. Swanson, *Christian Muslim Relations, 600–1500*, s.v. "Būlus ibn Rajā'."

brought him to his court. The Patriarch of Constantinople was presented, and the clergy and officers of the emperor, and [Yūḥannā] debated the Patriarch of Constantinople.⁴⁰

The letter appears to have been written from Yūḥannā's exile and imprisonment in the aftermath of these talks.⁴¹ According to Dagron, this letter "confirms and clarifies" the picture of the emperor dramatically betraying his promise.⁴² Given the other evidence that we have reviewed so far, it is worth taking a closer look at this claim. Does Yūḥannā's letter "confirm and clarify" the story of an imperial promise, dramatically broken? Does he mention the existence of an imperial chrysobull guaranteeing his rights against such treatment?

He does not. He appeals for solidarity with Mīnā II, saying that the patriarch of Constantinople had declared Mīnā a heretic, who was not fit to confirm Yūḥannā's own ordination.⁴³ He relates how the emperor summoned him and his party to Hagia Sophia, attempting to overawe them with the grandeur of their surroundings:

Then the emperor summoned us to himself, to the great church, and he showed us the decoration of the church, and its manifold beauties, its ornamentation, its curtains, and its lamps, and the great number of people in it, and the greatness of his kingdom, thinking that he could entice us, like boys, into desiring such ruinous things.⁴⁴

He relates how the emperor resumed the sixth- and seventh-century tradition of coercive theological

disputation. Prefacing his appeal with a reference to the slanders of Jews and Muslims (who disdained Christianity for its schismatic habits), Nikephoros called for an inquiry into the scriptures: "Come, let us gather together that we might inquire in the scriptures for the cause of the schism between us and you, for one, two, or even three months, and find out what the truth is, that we may all of us follow it."⁴⁵ Yūḥannā writes at length about the details of the theological disputes that followed⁴⁶ and the difficulty of providing the relevant patristic extracts in Greek rather than Syriac,⁴⁷ but he has nothing to say about an imperial guarantee of tolerance—much less an imperial seal or chrysobull that would testify to such a guarantee. None of this is to say that the story recounted in Michael's *Chronicle* is a fiction, or that we can state with certainty that the seal never existed. Perhaps Yūḥannā VII was so new to the ways of the empire that he did not appreciate the significance of such a document. (I find this unlikely.) Yet taken in sum, the evidence above presents a strong case for not taking this crucial passage from Michael at face value. A more careful consideration of the source for these details is thus in order.

It is not always possible to secure conclusive answers to such questions when they are posed to composite and compilatory late Syriac chronicles. However, in this case we are on unusually solid ground, and we can probably attribute this information with a high degree of confidence to one Ignatius of Melitene. The most important source attested by Michael for this portion of his *Chronicle*, Ignatius of Melitene served as the metropolitan of that city before dying in the last years of the eleventh century.⁴⁸ In a 2010 article by Jan van Ginkel, which assembles the fragments of information we have on Ignatius (as yet drawn exclusively from scattered mentions in Michael's *Chronicle*), the metropolitan emerges as an intriguing and complex figure. At some point near the end of his career, he was summoned to Constantinople to participate in the venerable tradition of coercive discussions regarding church

40 رسالة سنوديقي للأب الطاهر أنبا يوحنا بطريرك أنطاكية إلى أنبا مينا بطريرك الإسكندرية لما أنقذ ملك الروم واستأسر أنبا يوحنا بطريرك أنطاكية ومضى به إلى القسطنطينية وأحضره محضرته وبطرك القسطنطينية حاضر والكهنة ومقدمي الملك وجادل به بطرك القسطنطينية. *BOCV*, 2:132.

41 *BOCV*, 2:139–40.

42 Dagron, "L'immigration syrienne," 198: "Michel le Syrien et Bar Hebraeus accusent Nicéphore Phokas d'avoir presque aussitôt trahi sa 'promesse,' et une lettre de Jean VII Sarigta au patriarche copte d'Alexandrie Mar Mina/Ménas, conservée en version arabe, confirme et précise leur récit."

43 *BOCV*, 2:133.

44 فاستداعنا الملك إليه إلى كنيسهم الكبيرة وأرانا تزيين الكنيسة وكثرة جمالها وحليها وستورها ومصابيحها وكثرة الخلق فيها وعظم مملكته تقديرًا منه أنه يرغبنا في هذه الأحوال المنقضة كما يرغب الصبيان. *BOCV*, 2:134.

45 اجتمعوا لنبحث في الكتب شهرًا أو شهرين وثلاثة ونعرف الحق أين هو ونتبعه. *BOCV*, 2:134.

46 *BOCV*, 2:135–38.

47 *BOCV*, 2:135–36.

48 Michael the Syrian, 588 = Chabot, 4:585; [trans.] 3:185 (placing the date of his death in October 1095); Weltecke, *Beschreibung* (n. 5 above), 45–46; Hilken, *Anonymous Syriac Chronicle*, 293–304.

union, substituting for his uncle Athanasius VI Hāye, the patriarch of Antioch (r. 1057–1063), who had died while being transported to Constantinople. When the talks inevitably broke down, Ignatius was imprisoned in the Thracian monastery of Mount Ganos, which had previously “hosted” the Syrian Orthodox patriarch of Antioch, Yūḥanān VIII Bar Abdūn.⁴⁹ Despite this unpleasant run-in with the Chalcedonian authorities, Ignatius had a deep knowledge of the Greek scholarly tradition. Apparently he was highly proficient in the language and is reported to have written some unnamed translations from the Greek. Michael’s *Chronicle* compares him to Jacob of Edessa and Thomas of Herakleia, the great Syrian Orthodox translators from Greek into Syriac during the seventh century associated with the monastery of Qenneshre, a center of bilingual scholarship and translation.⁵⁰ On the evidence of its introduction (which Michael excerpts), and some passing comments by Michael, Ignatius’s chronicle was conceived in the tradition of Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Yūḥanān of Ephesos, and Jacob of Edessa—but was heavily reliant on Greek imperial histories for recent and contemporary events.⁵¹ The result was a strikingly hellenophilic document, or at least an imperial-centric one, in which the fate of the Syrian Orthodox was bound up with the fate of the Chalcedonian Empire in which they lived. In fact, Michael remarks that he had to supplement Ignatius’s account with material from the “writings of the nations,” because the metropolitan showed no interest in the affairs of the Arabs or the Turks.⁵² Van Ginkel goes so far as to characterize

Ignatius as the literary heir of Yūḥanān of Ephesos, in that his chronicle combined “Byzantine imperial ideology with Syrian Orthodox theology.”⁵³ Apparently, Ignatius’s knowledge of the Greek scholarly tradition was not unusual for the Syrian Orthodox bishops of Melitene—his successor is also said to have been proficient in both languages.⁵⁴

The crucial passage in Michael’s *Chronicle* that we have been examining may thus represent Ignatius’s “origin story” for the Byzantine and Syrian Orthodox Melitene in which he passed most of his life, and which was dramatically threatened by persecuting initiatives coming from Constantinople near to the time when he was writing. This should give us some pause. There is a kernel of truth behind Ignatius’s account, in that we can confirm an acceleration in the Syrian Orthodox immigration to Melitene during the reign of Nikephoros Phokas. But we have every reason to suspect that in recounting this neatly circumscribed origin story for Syrian Orthodox Melitene and its place in the Byzantine Empire, Ignatius is providing us with a normative account as well as a descriptive one: an idealized picture of the proper imperial relationship with the Syrian Orthodox, from which the later persecutions are so many regrettable declensions. Ignatius had compelling reasons for telescoping the different waves of Syrian Orthodox immigration to Melitene into a single moment, which coincided with a formal arrangement of tolerance. He also had compelling reasons to frame the “broken promise” of Nikephoros as a foundational (but not original or irrevocable) sin marking the relationship between the Syrian Orthodox and the Chalcedonian Empire. It simultaneously condemned the perfidy of later persecutors while holding open the possibility that the relationship might be restored to its “proper” status. It is impossible to say whether the broken-promise story originates with Ignatius or whether it preceded him, but one wonders if he might have colored a preexisting narrative with the story of the emperor’s seal. The political dynamics at play show some family resemblances to those governing the behavior of Chalcedonian monasteries in the imperial heartlands, for whom an imperial chrysobull granting privileges (usually fiscal) to a monastery’s founder was extremely valuable, allowing the later community to argue that these privileges had

49 Michael the Syrian, 579–80 = Chabot, 4:575–77; [trans.] 3:166–68; Vest, *Geschichte*, 3:1337–41. On the monastery, see A. Külzer, “Das Ganos-Gebirge in Ostthracien (Işıklar Dağı),” in *Heilige Berge und Wüsten: Byzanz und sein Umfeld; Referate auf dem 21. Internationalen Kongress für Byzantinistik, London, 21–26 August 2006* (Vienna, 2009), 42–51.

50 Michael the Syrian, 578 = Chabot, 4:575; [trans.] 3:165–66. J. Van Ginkel, “A Man Is Not an Island: Reflections of the Historiography of the Early Syriac Renaissance in Michael the Great,” in *The Syriac Renaissance*, ed. H. Teule, C. F. Tauwinkler, R. B. ter Haar Romeny, and J. Ginkel (Leuven, 2010), 114–15; see also Weltecke, *Beschreibung*, 134–35. On Qenneshre as a center of Greco-Syriac translation in the sixth and seventh centuries, see J. Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East* (Princeton, 2019), 169–76.

51 Michael the Syrian, 548–50 = Chabot, 4:545–47; [trans.] 3:114–16.

52 Michael the Syrian, 547–48 = Chabot, 4:544–45; [trans.] 3:112.

53 Van Ginkel, “A Man,” 116–17.

54 Michael the Syrian, 588–89 = Chabot, 4:585–86; [trans.] 3:185.

the character of inviolable guarantees.⁵⁵ Ignatius was certainly aware of the significance of documents bearing the emperor's seal as a symbol of the appeal to traditional and irrevocable rights, and that seems to be reflected in his narrative. It is hard to escape the sense that Ignatius is arguing for the rights of his community in an *eminently Byzantine way*, which should tell us something about how thoroughly integrated he was into the empire's political culture.

With all this being said, it is still reasonable to think that Nikephoros actively encouraged the immigration of the Syrian Orthodox to Melitene. But if we privilege Yūḥanān VII Srīgteh's own words—our closest *contemporary* source—rather than Michael's *Chronicle*, then the imperial posture looks less like a “dual policy” of tolerance in Melitene and persecution in Antioch, and more like the resumption of the sixth- and seventh-century pattern that held before the Arab Conquests. Nikephoros's call for doctrinal discussion between the Syrian Orthodox and “whomever you choose” looks like nothing so much as the doctrinal discussions under Justinian.⁵⁶ The long period of irenic silence during the reign of John Tzimiskes and much of the reign of Basil II, later succeeded by an imperially endorsed persecution in the reign of Romanos Argyros, looks like nothing so much as the transition from the reign of Anastasius to that of Justin and Justinian.⁵⁷ Ignatius's own peculiar and ambivalent relationship with Greek culture and imperial power is reminiscent of Yūḥanān of Ephesos, a loyal dissident living in the imperial capital on the qualified sufferance afforded by the unique position of Theodora. This is not to say that imperial relations with the Syrian Orthodox pick up exactly where they left off, but it does seem that previous scholars have failed to appreciate the extent to which the imperial attitudes and policies regarding heresy in this period are inconsistent and vacillating, in a way that very much resembles the dynamics of the sixth to seventh century.

Now that we have picked apart the evidentiary basis for Dagron's claim of an imperial guarantee of

tolerance for the Syrian Orthodox in Melitene, it is worth asking whether the other half of his proposed “dual policy” is well supported by the evidence. Were the Syrian Orthodox in Antioch subjected to sustained and imperially sponsored persecutions by the Chalcedonian patriarch? On closer examination, this claim also begins to crumble. The particularities of its disintegration should be of some interest to us, because they serve to illustrate how the Syrian Orthodox community of Melitene was increasingly wealthy and politically well connected in the Byzantine Empire of the late tenth century. So, what is Dagron's evidence for an official policy of persecution in Antioch? The case rests primarily on some passages in Michael's *Chronicle* relating to the tenure of Chalcedonian Patriarch Agapios II (r. 978–996).⁵⁸ This is confusing, because Agapios's tenure is dated to the reign of Basil II, a beloved figure in the Syriac chronicle tradition who is nowhere said to have sponsored persecutions.⁵⁹ The solution to this confusion emerges from developments in the field of Byzantine studies within the last twenty years. Having leveraged recent insights from Syriac specialists to undermine the thesis of official tolerance in Melitene, we must leverage the insights of Byzantine specialists to undermine the thesis of official intolerance in Antioch. In this respect we stand to benefit from the

58 Michael the Syrian, 560 = Chabot, 4:557; [trans.] 3:131–32. Dagron draws together the (broken) promise of Nikephoros and the persecutions of Agapios II into a coherent imperial “dual policy,” which broke down only with the proceedings against Yūḥanān VIII Bar Abdūn in 1030 (“L’immigration syrienne,” 207–8), but he strains to rationalize the contradictions apparent in the actions of different emperors, claiming that in spite of breaking his supposed promise, “Il n’y a pas en réalité contradiction dans l’attitude de Nicéphore Phocas,” and maintaining that Nikephoros and Tzimiskes differed only “par leur sens de l’opportunité” (ibid., 199). In truth, it seems that Dagron was misled by the sequence of events in the manuscript more than anything else. The story of Nikephoros and the chrysobull guaranteeing tolerance is immediately followed by the story of his “broken promise” and the coercive disputations in Constantinople, which is then followed by an account of the persecutions of Agapios. Dagron seems to have simply read pages 130–32 of Chabot's translation as a unified exposition of imperial policy, without ever taking full stock of the chronological and interpretive difficulties this entailed.

59 Michael the Syrian, 560–63 = Chabot, 4:557–59; [trans.] 3:132–33 (a highly complimentary account); *Chronicle of 1234*, CSCO 82:42 (brief but complimentary); *Chronicon Syriacum*, 212–13 (complimentary to both Basil and his brother Constantine VIII); Holmes, *Basil II*, 383–91; and Whittow, *Making*, 374–90.

55 See R. Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843–1118* (Cambridge, 1995), 145–65.

56 S. P. Brock, “The Conversations with the Syrian Orthodox under Justinian (532),” *OCP* 47 (1981): 87–121.

57 V. Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford, 2008), 12–57.

intervention of Catherine Holmes, who has done much to transform our understanding of imperial policy on the eastern frontier.

Building on the insights of Jean-Claude Cheynet, Holmes has largely superseded the sterile interpretive position (ultimately inherited from the *Chronographia* of Michael Psellos) that the history of Byzantium in the tenth and early eleventh centuries is best understood as the conflict between a provincial military aristocracy grown fat on the proceeds of reconquest and the old bureaucratic civil service in Constantinople.⁶⁰ Relying on a close reading of Yahyā of Antioch and John Skylitzes, Holmes portrays the eastern frontier as a disruptive field of opportunities for both the traditional and the parvenu elite alike. From this perspective, the turbulent politics of the latter half of the tenth century appear less as a factional confrontation between the bureaucrats and the military aristocracy, and more as a frantic scramble for advantage by a mutable congeries of individuals and alliances among the power elite. The family background of these elites was not the key variable. What mattered most was that some were much quicker than others to realize the opportunities presented by administrative and military service on the expanding frontiers.⁶¹

The persecutions of Agapios, properly contextualized by the supplementary evidence of Yahyā of Antioch, emerge as a product of the unstable politics of this dangerously wealthy frontier, shaped by the maneuvering of four individuals with an eye for the main

chance: Agapios himself; the *basilikos* of Melitene, 'Ubayd Allāh; the *basilikos* of Antioch, Kulayb; and the rebel general Bardas Skleros.⁶² In 976, 'Ubayd Allāh was serving as the *basilikos* of Melitene, acting as the local guarantor of the tributary relationship by which Melitene and its territories were integrated into the emperor's fiscal portfolio.⁶³ The fiscal importance of Melitene was such that when 'Ubayd Allāh surrendered it to Bardas Skleros in that year, it enabled the general to openly proclaim his bid for imperial status, initiating the civil wars that would consume the early reign of Basil II.⁶⁴ 'Ubayd Allāh parlayed his contribution to the usurper's war effort into a more prestigious posting as the *basilikos* of Antioch.⁶⁵ The knock-on effects of this event would eventually elevate Agapios of Aleppo to the patriarchal throne of Antioch. Once again, it is Yahyā who informs us of the maneuverings on the ground: Agapios traveled to the capital and promised Basil II that he could secure the defection of 'Ubayd Allāh in return for his own translation to the see of Antioch. Agapios was as good as his word, securing 'Ubayd Allāh's return to the imperial cause and assuming the patriarchal office in January 978.⁶⁶ In the following years, Agapios chose to pursue a program of conversion among the Syrian Orthodox population of Antioch. Agapios is said to have focused on the wealthy notables of the church, personally rebaptizing

60 A classic expression of the traditional perspective may be found in M. Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025–1204: A Political History* (New York, 1984), 1–11. Cheynet did much to revise the traditional standpoint: J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)* (Paris, 1990), 321–480. The best synthetic application of the new insights to the eastern frontier continues to be Holmes, “How the East,” 41–56; idem, *Basil II*, 299–391. But see also M. Whittow, “How the East Was Lost: The Background to the Komnenian Reconquista,” in *Alexios I Komnenos*, ed. M. Mullett and D. Smythe (Belfast, 1996), 55–67; J. Haldon, “Social Élite, Wealth, and Power,” in *A Social History of Byzantium*, ed. J. Haldon (Chichester, 2009), 168–211; M. Whittow, “The Second Fall: The Place of the Eleventh Century in Roman History,” in *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between; Papers from the 45th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, Oxford, 24–6 March*, ed. M. Lauxtermann and M. Whittow (Abingdon, 2017). Kaldellis (*Streams*, 13–18) integrates these developments into the difficult work of a new narrative history.

61 Holmes, *Basil II*, 299–391. It is interesting to reevaluate the examples presented by Shepard in light of this new perspective: Shepard, “Caucasian Openings,” 19–40.

62 The best account of Melitene's role in the period of the civil wars is Vest, *Geschichte*, 2:1108–38.

63 With regard to the fiscal machinery used to exploit the dependent territories of Antioch and Melitene, I am convinced by Holmes's argument that imperial *kouratōres* were not imperial estate managers but local power brokers wielding broadly delegated authority to ensure a steady flow of tribute to the imperial fisc through a wide variety of means, and that imperially appointed *basilikoi* served a similar role: Holmes, *Basil II*, 368–91; *pace* Howard-Johnston, “Crown Lands,” *ByzF* 21 (1995): 76–99, who does see *kouratōres* as estate managers, and thus concludes that huge stretches of reconquered territory were converted into crown lands.

64 On the agrarian basis of the larger region's wealth, in which pastoralism played a crucial role, the best resource is J. E. Cooper and M. J. Decker, *Life and Society in Byzantine Cappadocia* (London, 2012), 49–103.

65 Yahyā, PO 23, 372–74; Holmes, *Basil II*, 379–80.

66 Yahyā, PO 23, 375–78; Holmes, “How the East,” 48–50; K.-P. Todt, “Region in Griechisch-Orthodoxes Patriarchat von Antiocheia in mittelbyzantinischer Zeit (969–1084),” *BZ* 94 (2001): 258–59; but the definitive study on the Patriarchate of Antioch in the whole period of the Byzantine reconquest is now K.-P. Todt, *Dukat*.

many and acting as their godfather.⁶⁷ Yet it is important to emphasize that Agapios was functioning with a high degree of autonomy during a period of civil war; the politics of persecution are likely more complicated than they seem. It is worth reminding ourselves that during this period Bardas Skleros would formally declare rebellion in Melitene, backed by a confessionally heterogeneous military force, not once, but *twice*.⁶⁸ The persecution was not entirely epiphenomenal to the secular politics, but the secular politics certainly had a role to play.⁶⁹

Yet Agapios seems to have been relatively isolated in his will to persecute; there is no evidence that his contemporaries in the secular hierarchy shared his inclination. When 'Ubayd Allāh became the *basilikos* of Antioch, he traded places with another former servant of the Hamdanids, Kulayb. Kulayb is generally assumed to have been an Arabic-speaking Melkite, but the Syriac chronicle tradition claims that he sponsored the construction of the Syrian Orthodox monastery of Bar Gagai. If he was a Melkite, he made no attempt to impose his theological views on the Syrian Orthodox population of Melitene.⁷⁰ Both 'Ubayd Allāh (whose

defection involved a promise that he would remain the *basilikos* of Antioch for life) and Kulayb seem to have thrived during the political turbulence of the civil wars, and indeed afterwards. Neither appears to have suffered serious consequences for their defection to Bardas Skleros.⁷¹ Agapios was not so lucky. The one identifiable exponent of a persecuting policy on the eastern frontier in these years was unceremoniously deposed in 996, to be replaced by the chartophylax of Hagia Sophia, John III Polites (r. 996–1021), of whom nothing uncomplimentary is reported in our Syriac sources.⁷² This was part of a larger pattern whereby Basil II installed Constantinopolitan notables in the top level of the eastern administration. But there is not even a whisper that such officials sponsored persecutions.⁷³ There is, in short, little evidence to support the thesis that imperial policy regarded Antioch as a Potemkin village of Orthodoxy. Indeed, as we shall see, by the time that a truly serious effort at persecution was formulated in the capital, the voices in favor of tolerance were centered in and around the Chalcedonian patriarchate of Antioch.

Before moving on to a detailed examination of the events surrounding the imperially sponsored persecution under Romanos Argyros, it is worth underlining the impact of imperial favor and economic boom on the Syrian Orthodox population of Melitene. Freed from the complex restrictions on church building and renovation that pertained under Arab rule, wealthy and influential laymen like Kulayb and the clan of Abū 'Imrān invested in an astonishing run of ecclesiastical construction, which seems to have been the favored mode of status display for the secular elite.⁷⁴ In a

67 Michael the Syrian, 559–60 = Chabot 4:557; [trans.] 3:131–32.

68 Holmes, *Basil II*, 240–98; Kaldellis, *Streams*, 83–87, 96–97.

69 Rather strangely, both Michael and Bar Hebraeus (presumably reflecting Ignatius) state that Agapios put an end to his persecution out of respect for the personal merits of the Syrian Orthodox patriarch Athanasius IV Ṣālhāyā (r. 986–1003): Michael the Syrian, 562 = Chabot 4:559; [trans.] 3:135. Michael uses rather elliptical phrasing, saying that Athanasius obtained peace for the faithful in the region of Antioch because Agapios respected his learning and holiness, but Bar Hebraeus's *Ecclesiastical Chronicle* simply states that Agapios “ended his persecution of the faithful” because he was “in awe of the virtue” of Athanasius (ܡܝܚܐ ܕܡܠܝܚܐ ܕܐܬܢܐܨܝܐ ܕܐܢܬܝܘܨܝܐ ܕܐܬܢܐܨܝܐ ܕܐܢܬܝܘܨܝܐ). *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, 415. This rationale for the end of persecution should be taken with a grain of salt, but it is probably true that Agapios ceased his persecuting campaign well before he was removed from office. The chronology is not precise at this point, but given that Athanasius IV assumed the patriarchate in 986, one wonders whether Agapios's termination of the persecution might have coincided with the defeat of Bardas Phokas the Younger in April 989, which finally brought the civil wars of Basil II's early reign to a close. Again, there is reason to suspect that the Syriac sources may be playing coy about the role of secular politics in all this. One wonders how different our perspective might be if Agapios, like his predecessor Christopher, had been written up in a vita produced by an intimate.

70 Michael the Syrian, 556 = Chabot 4:553; [trans.] 3:126 (placing the sponsorship of Bar Gagay in 987/988); *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, 408 (placing the sponsorship at a later period—Michael is to be

preferred, given the direction of dependence). Both sources specify that Kulayb had taken the Greek name “Eutychios” and give his title as *patrikios*, but—significantly—provide no information on his engagement with the secular politics of empire; Holmes, *Basil II*, 376–79; Dagron, “L'immigration syrienne,” 192, 197; *PmbZ* 2:24209 (incomplete, as it does not include the Syriac evidence). The assumption of a Greek name and title does make it more likely that Kulayb was a Melkite, but the possibility that he was Syrian Orthodox cannot be ruled out entirely.

71 Holmes, *Basil II*, 377–78.

72 Yahyā, *PO* 23, 428, 445–46; Holmes, “How the East Was Won,” 50–51; Holmes, *Basil II*, 382–84; Todt, “Region,” 258–59.

73 Holmes, *Basil II*, 383–91; cf. Whittow, *Making* (n. 15 above), 374–90.

74 W. Hage, *Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche in frühislamischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1966), 66–77; Weltecke, “60 Years” (n. 11 above), 328.

fascinating article of 1986, Andrew Palmer convincingly proved that the revival of the Estrangela script in the Tur Abdin may ultimately be traced to Melitene, which also served as an important source of expensive vellum.⁷⁵ Melitene would eventually develop a reputation for conspicuous wealth displayed with imperfect grace. The *Chronicle of 1234* reports, with ill-disguised irritation, of the arrival in the mid-twelfth century of a large group of wealthy carpetbaggers from Melitene. The immigrants attended the church of the God-Bearer in Edessa, while the poorer indigenous members of the community attended Mār Theodore, and there seems to have been serious friction between the two churches.⁷⁶ The destabilizing impact of the new prosperity was by no means restricted to the secular politics of empire.

Neither was Melitene's reputation as a bustling and prosperous city confined by the borders of the empire. The Coptic bishop Michael of Tinnīs toured the city when he was circulating the synodical letter of the Coptic patriarch Christodoulos (r. 1046–1077) in 1048/49.⁷⁷ It seems to have left a powerful impression on him. The two things he highlights in his description are the number of churches that the population had built once freed from the restrictions of Islamic rule, and the fact that the male population was able to participate in military affairs (and probably—by implication—political decision-making):

Melitene was near to the monastery in which this holy father lived, nor was there any place in his see which was larger or more populated by Christians. In it there were fifty-six churches filled with priests and many Syrian Orthodox people. Their number was some sixty-thousand

Christians, who bore arms if they wished to or had need to—women excepted.⁷⁸

This prosperous and self-confident border society waxed in wealth and importance throughout the reigns of John Tzimiskes and Basil II.⁷⁹ Moreover, the Syrian Orthodox increasingly rubbed elbows with other confessions: we have good evidence for a significant influx of Armenians, both non-Chalcedonian and (to an extent often underappreciated) Chalcedonian.⁸⁰ But the full extent of this society's wealth, its integration into the upper reaches of empire, and its easy promiscuity with respect to confessional boundaries only becomes fully clear after the death of Basil II, when highly placed elements in the capital subjected it to sustained attack.

Yūḥanān VIII Bar Abdūn and the End of Tolerance (1025–1030)

The death of Basil II marked a changing of the guard in the ecclesiastical as well as the secular sphere: the year 1025 witnessed the accession of Alexios the Studite to the patriarchal throne of Constantinople. In the last year of his life, Basil II developed a close relationship with the monastery of Stoudios, apparently relying on its intercession for his physical and spiritual health. In January 1025, he appointed the *hēgoumenos* of the monastery, Nicholas, to the patriarchal throne of Antioch. Nicholas was replaced as *hēgoumenos* by Alexios, who was soon summoned to the emperor's sickbed (ultimately his deathbed) carrying the monastery's famous relic of the head of John the Baptist. In December 1025, Alexios was appointed to the throne of Constantinople.⁸¹ The patriarchate had appeared

On the building program, see Dagron, "L'immigration syrienne," 188–97; this has now essentially been superseded by Vest, *Geschichte*, 899–1162.

75 Palmer, "Charting Undercurrents" (n. 11 above), 37–68.

76 *Chronicle of 1234*, CSCO 82:295–96, 343; Weltecke, "60 Years," 319.

77 *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*, ed. and trans. A. S. 'Aṭīyya and Y. 'Abd al-Masīḥ, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1943–76), 2.2:142, 147, [trans.] 215, 222 (hereafter, *HPEC*). On Michael of Tinnīs (whose *nisba* actually refers to his native village of Damrū, rather than to his bishopric), see M. Swanson, *Christian Muslim Relations, 600–1500*, s.v. "Michael of Damrū."

78 وكانت ملطية قريبة من الدير الذي سكن فيه هذا الأب القديس وليس كان في كرسية أعظم منها ولا أكثر نصارى وكان فيها سئة وخمسين كنيسة عامرة بالكهنة والشعب الكثير السريان الأرثوذكسيين وكان عددهم ستين ألف نصراني يحملوا السلاح. إذا أرادوا واحتاجوا إلى ذلك سوى النساء. *HPEC*, 2.2:141–42; [trans.] 214–15.

79 See the remarks of Vest, *Geschichte*, 2:1191–92.

80 N. G. Garsoian, "The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire," in *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. H. Ahrweiler and A. Laiou (Washington, DC, 1998), 53–124.

81 *PmbZ*, no. 20247, s.v. Alexios the Studite; V. Stanković, "Patrijarhat Aleksija Studita (1025–1043): Početak porasta patrijaršijske moći," *ZRVI* 39 (2001).

politically supine during the sole rule of Basil II, but in the climate of uncertainty that shrouded the tenure of Basil's aging and childless brother Constantine VIII, Alexios the Studite expanded its influence significantly. Tellingly, the first surviving official document to bear his subscription appears in the *Ius Graecoromanum*. Issued in July 1026, the decree was jointly subscribed by the emperor, the patriarch, and the *synodos endēmousa*, and applies the church's anathema to "those who hereafter should try their hands at plots or rebellion."⁸²

Constantine's successor, Romanos III Argyros, was not much more secure. In a pattern recognizable from the accessions of the emperor Justin and the empresses Irene and Theodora, Romanos seems to have compensated for his fragile mandate by consolidating a base of support among the backers of an unfashionable dogmatic position.⁸³ Alexios the Studite was by this point already entangled in his controversial effort to upend the status quo in the religious policy of the eastern frontier, and the emperor and patriarch seem to have quickly forged an arrangement of mutual support. In a notable departure from precedent, multiple *synkelloi* were appointed: Kyriakos of Ephesos, Michael of Euchaita, and Demetrios of Kyzikos. Kyriakos of Ephesos was the patriarch's brother, while Michael of Euchaita and Demetrios of Kyzikos had close ties to the emperor. As recipients of the imperial title of *synkellos*, all three had precedence in the church hierarchy over the other metropolitan bishops.⁸⁴ Alexios and Romanos seem to have anticipated resistance in the *synodos endēmousa* to their coming initiatives, and so took these innovative measures to consolidate their position. As we shall see, they were wise to do so. Demetrios of Kyzikos composed a tract against the Syrian Orthodox in this period, intended to provide a theological mandate for the repeal of tolerance. The genealogy established in this treatise, which traces the descent of the "Jacobites" from the heresy of Eutyches and Dioskoros, would feature prominently in the May 1030 decree confirming the deposition of Yūḥanān VIII Bar Abdūn as

a "self-ordained" heretic.⁸⁵ In the meantime, initiatives to have the Syrian Orthodox patriarch arrested by the secular authorities, which had been set into motion during the reign of Constantine VIII, finally came to fruition.⁸⁶

Alexios capitalized on his opportunity with impressive speed. Romanos came to the throne in November 1028; by Christmas, Yūḥanān Bar Abdūn was already under house arrest in Melitene. Brought to Constantinople during the following spring and summer, together with six of his metropolitan bishops, he was tried, deposed, and then exiled in October 1029 to the monastery on Mount Ganos, where he eventually died as a martyr.⁸⁷ We are uniquely well equipped to evaluate the political fault lines exposed by these events, as contemporary accounts have survived in the Chalcedonian, Syrian Orthodox, and Coptic Orthodox traditions, and they provide a reasonably consonant narrative of the key events.⁸⁸ For the Chalcedonian patriarch, we have a decree issued in May 1030 and subscribed by the *synodos endēmousa*, which confirmed Yūḥanān Bar Abdūn's deposition and the semi-coerced conversion of three of his metropolitan bishops to Chalcedonian Christianity. The decree justified the actions taken with a robust and sophisticated legal argument drawn from conciliar canons and the imperial legislation against heretics.⁸⁹

85 As yet only accessible in PG 187:879–83; Dagron, "L'immigration syrienne," n. 108.

86 Dagron, "L'immigration syrienne," 200–201; Vest, *Geschichte*, 2:1196–1207; Z. Chitwood, *Byzantine Legal Culture and the Roman Legal Tradition, 867–1056* (Cambridge, 2017), 135–39.

87 Vest, *Geschichte*, 2:1196–1223 should now be regarded as the standard account of the whole episode.

88 Michael the Syrian, 563–68 = Chabot 4:560–65; [trans.] 3:137–45. *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, 421–31 (but Bar Hebraeus appears to be entirely dependent on Michael for his account). *Chronicle of 1234*, CSCO 82:283–84 (sadly we are missing two folios here, so the account is radically truncated; however, it is clear from certain parallel phrases that the anonymous chronicler had access to the same source, which may indicate that Ignatius was the proximate intermediary between the original Syriac vita and both Michael and the anonymous author of the *Chronicle of 1234*). Yahya, PO 47, 488–91. *HPEC*, 2.2:139–47; [trans.] 211–23. G. Ficker, ed., *Erlasse des Patriarchen von Konstantinopel Alexios Studites* (Kiel, 1911), 8–2 (hereafter, *Erlasse*). Alexandre Roberts is also working on a study of the parallel sources for the trial of Bar Abdūn, which is eagerly awaited.

89 V. Grumel and J. Darrouzès, *Les Regestes des actes du Patriarcat de Constantinople* (Constantinople, 1932–92), nos. 838–40; on the synodal decrees of Alexios the Studite in a wider context, see the

82 "Τοῖς μέλλουσιν ἢ ἐπιβουλαῖς ἀπὸ γε τοῦ νῦν ἐπιχειρεῖν ἢ μούλτω, ἀνάθεμα" *Zepos, Jus*, 1:273–74.

83 The parallel with Justin is particularly intriguing; see the argument of Menze, *Justinian* (n. 57 above), 18–30.

84 J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford, 1986), 111–23; V. Grumel, "Les métropolitains syncelles," *REB* 3 (1945): 94–101.

The Syriac evidence first: the *vita* is marked off quite deliberately in the Edessa–Aleppo Codex, introduced by a heading in the manuscript’s characteristic red ink. The heading identifies what follows as “from the history of Mār Yūḥanān Bar Abdūn.” Clearly, this has been transcribed or paraphrased from a preexisting hagiographical *vita*.⁹⁰ We have two plausible suspects for the original author, for which several pieces of evidence may be adduced. The first is one of the concluding passages attached to the *vita*, which reads as follows:

two studies by F. Lauritzen, "Against the Enemies of Tradition: Alexios Studites and the Synodikon of Orthodoxy," in *Orthodoxy and Heresy: Proceedings of the XX Annual Conference of Saint Tikhon University*, ed. A. Rigo and P. Ermilov (Rome, 2010), 41–48, and "Synod Decrees of the Eleventh Century (1025–1081): A Classification of the Documents of the *Synodos Endēmousa*," *BZ* 105.1 (2012): 101–16. On the changing political dynamics of the *synodos endēmousa*, see also J. Hajjar, "Le Synode permanent (synodos endēmousa) dans l'Église byzantine des origines au XI^e siècle," *OCA* (Rome, 1962), 110, 134–36, 150–78.

The plot thickens when we turn to the miniature *vita* authored by Michael of Tinnīs. At the end of this account, Michael *also* mentions that Bar Abdún went into exile with a single disciple, who attended to his needs in his last days. Michael does not name this disciple, but there is no good reason to believe that it is not the Īwanī of the Syriac account. The case is especially strong because Michael's Arabic narrative retails some miraculous stories about Bar Abdún in his exile, in which the unnamed disciple features prominently. Once again, this aligns with the Syriac tradition, which attributes to Īwanī a book about the miracles and visions granted to Bar Abdún in exile. After telling the story of Bar Abdún's death, and specifically noting his disciple's release from imprisonment, Michael tells one more miracle story about Bar Abdún from an earlier period before his exile. He then wraps up his narrative by explaining the circumstances in which he learned all this, referring to his own trip to Melitene as the bearer of the synodical letter of Patriarch Christodoulos in

92 *Michael the Syrian*, 568 = Chabot 4:565; [trans.] 3:147.

1048/49. In a further digressive gloss, Michael explains that Bar Abdún's nephew Yūḥanān IX (1042 [1048?]-1057) was on the throne at this time; he then moves immediately to discuss the source of his own information on the life of Bar Abdún. The full passage reads as follows:

There sat on the Throne of Antioch, after this saint Yūḥannā, the son of his brother, and they called him Yūḥannā the patriarch. God grant to us (acceptation) of the intercession and blessing of both of them together. His disciple informed me, I, Michael, the writer of this biography, about this, when I went to the Throne of Antioch, after I had become bishop of the see of the city of Tinnis and its districts, and with me there was Abba Gabriel bishop of Šā with the synodical letter which Abba Christodoulos, patriarch of Alexandria, wrote to Abba Yūḥannā the aforementioned, in the year seven hundred and sixty-five of the Martyrs [1048-1049 CE]; for I asked this disciple and said to him: "So, did the father Abba Yūḥannā really raise the dead?" He personally described to me all that I have mentioned in this biography.⁹³

The context of the sentence thus makes it unclear whether the disciple in question was a disciple of Yūḥanān VIII Bar Abdún, a disciple of his nephew Yūḥanān IX, or perhaps even Yūḥanān IX himself as a "disciple" of his uncle. But with all things set in the balance, I prefer to interpret Michael's references to this disciple as a resumptive phrase embedded within his digressive gloss. In other words, I think it most likely that this refers to the disciple about whom Michael has

been speaking throughout the entire concluding section of the vita: Īwanī.⁹⁴ We thus have compelling evidence that the information in both the Syriac and the Arabic vita ultimately stems from eyewitness accounts of the events in Constantinople and Mount Ganos.

Both vitae are, of course, bound by the constraints of the hagiographical genre. The patriarch's trial and exile are structured as a recapitulation of Christ's judicial murder at the hands of the Roman authorities. Nevertheless, in a paradox by no means unfamiliar in the Greek or the Latin Middle Ages, the vita is anxious to affirm the legitimacy of that same imperial authority. The main through lines of the Syriac vita in particular are Yūḥanān Bar Abdún's respect and obedience before imperial authority, and the intense dissatisfaction of numerous Chalcedonian magistrates and churchmen with the harshness of his treatment. The following provides a rough sketch of the full account. Born and raised in Melitene, Yūḥanān Bar Abdún was apparently a person of means. His parents were opposed to his youthful forays into asceticism, and his father is said to have forcibly retrieved him from his first monastic seclusion, as he wished Yūḥanān to inherit his wealth. The later succession of Bar Abdún's nephew to the patriarchal throne would seem to confirm that the family was relatively prominent in the community of Melitene. Nevertheless, the young Yūḥanān persisted and divided his adult ascetic career between a cave on the banks of the Euphrates and the famous Black Mountain outside of Antioch.⁹⁵ At some point he appears to have returned to the area of Melitene, and

93 وجلس على كرسي أنطاكية بعد هذا القديس يوحنا ابن أخيه وأسموه يوحنا 93 بطرركا رزقنا الله شفاعتهما وبركتهما جميعاً، وتلميذه أخبرني أنا مخائيل كاتب هذه السيرة بذلك لما مضيت إلى كرسي أنطاكية بعد أن صرت أسقفاً على كرسي مدينة تينيس وأعمالها ومعني أنبا غبريال أسقف صا بالرسالة السنوديقا التي كتبها أنبا أرسطودولوس بطريرك الإسكندرية إلى أبا يوحنا المقدم ذكره في سنة سبع مائة خمسة وستون للشهداء لأنني سألت هذا التلميذ وقلت له نعم أقام الأب أبا يوحنا الميت أحقاً هو فشرح لي جميع ما ذكرته في هذه السيرة. *HPEC*, 2.2:147; [trans.] 222-23. On the troublesome dating of the tenure of Yūḥanān IX, see the comments of J.-B. Chabot, ed. and trans., *Chronique de Michel le Syrien Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166-1199)*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1899-1910), 3:139 n. 1, 471-72 (though note that we can be reasonably sure that he was indeed on the patriarchal throne in 1048/49—it is his earlier tenure that is obscure). My thanks to Alexandre Roberts for his advice on my translation here.

94 *Pace Vest (Geschichte*, 2:1190-92), who prefers to interpret the disciple in question as Yūḥanān IX. But it would be unwise to adopt a dogmatic posture on this question: the language and context are very obscure, and Vest rightly points out that there are further chronological confusions associated with a prior reference to Michael's visit to Melitene: some ambiguous phrasing might seem to indicate a second, earlier visit in the 1020s. Michael would have been very young at the time so this does not seem plausible. Vest is quite correct to surmise that such an earlier visit is unlikely to have taken place and to attribute the source of all Michael's information to his visit of 1048/49. I am less sure whether he is correct in suggesting that the confusion might lie in an editorial or scribal mixup. Michael seems to have simply been rather awkward in managing the transitions into and out of his digressive glosses, a problem compounded by the presence of a homonymous patriarch in the Melitene of 1048/49. In short, I prefer my own surmise of Īwanī as Michael's informant, but I do not consider the matter to be decisively settled.

95 Michael the Syrian, 563-64 = Chabot 4:560-61; [trans.] 3:137-38.

was uncovered as a self-ordained person who had rightly secured for himself the appellation of “heresiarch” and had aged into the gray hairs of his heresy, he would not consent to be reconciled and he despised the holy word; he stiffened his neck like an iron cable, as though running and evading his own salvation (for having no shame in teaching erroneously he was ashamed to learn properly). And so, like some rotten limb, he was by us synodically cut off from the healthy body of the church, and by the imperial power he was sent off to the mountain called “of Gaius” [Mount Ganos], condemned to a confined and inescapable exile.¹¹⁰

This provides the decree with its central moment of drama, but the sophisticated jurisprudential reasoning that fills the second half of the decree is occasioned by the treatment of Yūḥanān’s metropolitan bishops.¹¹¹

In the first stage of the proceedings, Yūḥanān had been examined together with his metropolitan bishops and his attendants (the Syriac and Arabic vitae dwell on the fact that they were not allowed to sit).¹¹² But his presence stiffened the spine of his subordinates, so the synod thereafter chose to summon the accused one by one and attempted to compel them to affirm Chalcedon and renounce their former Christological confession in written *libelloi*, a detail confirmed by the Syriac vita. Both the Greek decree and the Syriac vita name three out of the six metropolitans as submitting to pressure and producing these statements of consent to the Chalcedonian creed: Zachariah of Arqā, Ignatius of Melitene (not the Ignatius of

Melitene who is one of Michael’s sources), and Moses of Mesopotamia.¹¹³ There follows in the May 1030 decree an extended jurisprudential argument on how the ecumenical canons are to be applied to these repentants—in particular, whether they may be reintegrated into the Chalcedonian hierarchy, and whether this demands reordination. The solution proposed, a complicated set of arrangements that relies on canons originally written to adjudicate the prerogatives of *chōrepiskopoi*, is clearly meant for programmatic and universal application.¹¹⁴ It is said to apply to “both those bishops who were called by grace to unite with the catholic church [that is, Ignatius, Zachariah, and Moses], and those who would later be added to the portion of the saved,” a statement which would seem to adumbrate a broad policy of conversion of the clergy.¹¹⁵ In the event, we have no evidence that this policy ever amounted to anything beyond recurring attempts to arrest the highest level of the Syrian Orthodox hierarchy and have them brought to Constantinople for “discussions.” These attempts would force Bar Abdūn’s successor to move his residence to Amida, but there is little evidence that they seriously damaged or obstructed the life of the Syrian Orthodox laity or lower clergy in Melitene and its environs.¹¹⁶

However, the sophistication of the jurisprudential reasoning stands out in high relief when compared to what came before. It seems to mark a new departure in the methods by which the ecumenical canons

110 Ἀλλ’ ἐπεὶ ὁ καὶ τὴν κακίαν τούτων πρῶτος καὶ τὸ ἀξίωμα Ἰωάννης, ὁ τῆς τῶν Ἰακωβιτῶν ἐξάρχων αἵρέσεως καὶ πατριάρχης μὲν οὐκέτι, —πῶθεν γάρ;— αἵρεσιάρχου δὲ προσηγορίαν εἰκότως ἀπενεγκάμενος αὐτοχειροτόνητος φωραθεὶς καὶ συγγρασας τῇ πολιᾷ τῆς αἵρέσεως οὔτε συνῆκε τοῦ συνιέναι καὶ λόγον ὅσιον ἐβδελύξατο καὶ ὡσανεὶ τὸ σιδηροῦν νεῦρον τὸν τράχηλον ἀπεσκήληκε κατὰ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ὥσπερ τρέχων σωτηρίας καὶ σοφίζομενος, (τὸ γὰρ ἐπισφαλῶς διδάσκειν οὐκ αἰσχυρόμενος τὸ καλῶς μανθάνειν ἡσχύνετο) οἷόν τι σεσηπὸς μέλος συνοδικῶς παρ’ ἡμῶν τὸ ὑγιαίνοντος ἀπετμήθη τῆς ἐκκλησίας πληρώματος καὶ ψήφῳ τοῦ βασιλικοῦ κράτους εἰς τὸ τοῦ Γάνου καλοῦμενον ὄρος παραπεμφθεὶς περιορισμὸν κατεκρίθη ἀδιεξόδευτον καὶ ἀπρόϊτον. *Erlasse*, 12–13; all translations from the patriarchal decrees are my own.

111 *Erlasse*, 12–18.

112 *Erlasse*, 12; Michael the Syrian, 567–68 = Chabot 4:564; [trans.] 3:142–43; *HPEC*, 2.2:143–44; [trans.] 217.

113 Michael the Syrian, 567 = Chabot 4:564; [trans.] 3:143. The Syriac vita has Zachariah’s name as Isaac and identifies Moses by his metropolitan seat of Ḥiṣn Ziyād, but these are relatively minor transformations presumably engendered by the process of translation from Syriac to Greek: *Erlasse*, 13–14 (though note that the decree makes no mention of the three metropolitans who, according to the Syriac vita, refused to commune; but this is hardly surprising). The Arabic vita recounts the same basic story, but provides no names for Bar Abdūn’s subordinates and gives a different number: whereas the Syriac vita has three out of six metropolitan bishops submitting to communion with Chalcedon, Michael of Tinnis has two out of four submitting. The fact that he has different numbers but the same ratio might seem to indicate that he was recalling facts he had learned through conversation: *HPEC*, 2.2:144; [trans.] 218–19.

114 On this always mysterious office and the question of its proper jurisdiction, see F. Gillmann, *Das Institut der Chorbischöfe im Orient* (Munich, 1904), 117–31.

115 . . . αὐτοὺς καὶ τοὺς ἐνωθέντας τῇ καθολικῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐπισκόπους προσκληθέντας ὑπὸ τῆς χάριτος καὶ τοὺς ἐξ αὐτῶν ἔτι τῇ τῶν σωζομένων μερίδι προστίθεται μέλλοντας . . . *Erlasse*, 14.

116 Michael the Syrian, 569 = Chabot 4:566; [trans.] 3:147.

were made to speak to present realities. Given that the patriarchate of Constantinople—unlike that of Rome—never developed a tradition of issuing canonically binding decretals capable of establishing new precedents, the importance of such creative exegetical techniques was enormous if patriarchal or synodal decisions were to be represented as in accordance with the canons.¹¹⁷ Zachary Chitwood has recently made a compelling examination of the sophisticated jurisprudential reasoning present in the patriarchal decrees of Alexios the Studite and used it as evidence that the efflorescence of legal studies under the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos did not come as a bolt from the blue.¹¹⁸ In light of the evidence that we have reviewed so far, we are now in a position to make an important supplement to Chitwood's argument. Given the opposition of the Chalcedonian patriarchate of Antioch under Nicholas II to the new policy of persecution, it seems best to interpret the evident preoccupation in the decrees of Alexios the Studite with harmonizing contradictions in prior legislation as the product of an intra-Chalcedonian debate. In other words, the primary target of this kind of canonical hairsplitting would be Nicholas II and the position that he represented. Once again, it is difficult not to speculate on the attitude of Nicholas II and his suffragans toward these initiatives. One suspects that the very idea of the Constantinopolitan patriarchate propounding a specific interpretation of the canon law as binding for the entire Chalcedonian world would have rankled.

The evidence that can be adduced from the text of the decrees is actually twofold: first, the frequent presence of phantom disputants in their legal reasoning, and second, their concern to resolve seeming contradictions in the normative law codes. We may note in the first place the suppressed rebuke to advocates of

tolerance implicit in the complimentary description of John of Melitene found in the opening of the May 1030 decree:

Whence they [The Syrian Orthodox] also roused John, the most holy bishop of Melitene—(in which the extremities of this wicked teaching are customary)—who was inflamed in his soul by the fire of divine zeal. He understood that it is good to make peace with everyone, as long as everyone agrees about piety, yet it is even better to stand in opposition when the instruments of peace would effect a treaty with wickedness, for *great peace*, as the prophet says, *belongs to those who love your law, and for them there is no stumbling* [Psalms 119:165].¹¹⁹

Indeed, the entire decree is shadowed by indirect rebuttals and preemptive attacks, exemplified by the phrase that introduces its most elaborate prophylactic argument: “But if perhaps one should be found speaking in opposition.”¹²⁰ The phrase opens a crucial portion of the decree's jurisprudential argument on the question of reordination. It is difficult not to think of Nicholas II and his fellow travelers as the likely targets of attack. However, some of these tacit rebukes seem to have other targets in mind. The complimentary passage on John of Melitene quoted above is immediately followed by a curiously phrased addendum:

At the same time he discerned perfectly that in the stewards of souls, nothing is more honorable than love, and faith, and hope in God. Even if someone were to cite parents, brothers, friends or any other close natural relationship—none of them render us partakers in what is promised.¹²¹

117 We find ourselves midway between the situation described by D. Wagschal (*Law and Legality in the Greek East: The Byzantine Canonical Tradition*, 381–883 [Oxford, 2015], 223–74), in which the absence of a strong drive for systematization and harmonization is notable, and the situation described by S. Troianos (“Byzantine Canon Law from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Centuries,” in *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law*, ed. W. Hartmann and K. Pennington [Washington, DC, 2012], 115–69), in which systematization and harmonization have become important concerns.

118 Z. Chitwood, “The Patriarch Alexios the Studite and the Reinterpretation of Justinianic Legislation against Heretics,” *GRBS* 54.2 (2014): 293–312; idem, *Byzantine Legal Culture* (n. 86, above), 133–49.

119 “Ὅθεν καὶ διανέστησαν Ἰωάννην τὸν ἱερώτατον μητροπολίτην Μελιτηνῆς, ἔνθα καὶ τὰ τῆς κακοδοξίας εἰς ἄκρον ἐπεχωρίαζε μάλιστ’ ὅς πυρὶ θεοῦ ζήλου διαναφθεῖς τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ καλὸν μὲν τὸ πρὸς ἅπαντας εἰρηνεύειν εἰδώς, ἀλλ’ ὁμονοοῦντας πρὸς τὴν εὐσέβειαν, κρείττον δὲ τὸ ἀνθίστασθαι, ὅτε τὴν ἐπὶ τῷ κακῷ συμφωνίαν τὰ τῆς εἰρήνης ἐργάζεται· εἰρήνη γάρ φησιν ὁ προφήτης πολλὴ τοῖς ἀγαπῶσι τὸν νόμον σου, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς σκάνδαλον . . .” *Erlasse*, 10.

120 Εἰ δέ τις ἀντιλεγὼν ἴσως εὐρίσκειτο *Erlasse*, 16.

121 Καὶ ἅμα διελὼν ἄριστα ὡς οὐδὲν τοῖς τῶν ψυχῶν οἰκονόμοις τῆς εἰς θεὸν ἀγάπης καὶ πίστεως καὶ ἐλπίδος καθεστῆκε τιμιώτερον, κἂν γονεῖς τις εἴπῃ κἂν ἀδελφοὺς κἂν φίλους κἂν ἄλλο τι τῶν οἰκειοτέρων

It is entirely possible that this is an item of purely rhetorical ornamentation. But it is also possible that it reflects a real source of temptation to laxity—the temptation to not make waves in a situation where Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians coexist in a state of some intimacy. The question cannot be settled definitively, but it serves as a useful inflection point on which to transition to the later evidence of the decree of September 1039.

The decree of May 1030 was primarily addressed to the problem posed by the existence of a separate Syrian Orthodox clerical hierarchy, and the question of how they might be reintegrated into the structures of the Chalcedonian church. The decree of September 1039, by contrast, addresses itself to issues that are explicitly within the purview of lay society: marriage and inheritance.¹²² Like its predecessor, the decree opens with a flowery tribute to John of Melitene, who remains steadfast in the face of what appear to have been positively innumerable temptations to indulge in a latitudinarian *oikonomia*.¹²³

But this [heresy] did not therefore find John, the most God-loving metropolitan of Melitene, asleep at his post, nor did he fail to arm himself with all his power against those arrayed against him; for many of this God-loving man's initiatives in the region have been undermined, and more than a few have been referred to the synod in the queen of cities.¹²⁴

It appears that some of the good metropolitan's sheep had continued to be less than conscientious in their adherence to his pastoral guidance. However, the main body of the decree is, once again, almost entirely devoted to the resolution of seeming contradictions in canon and civil law. These contradictions stand to prevent secular judges from carrying out their solemn duties to forbid the marriage of orthodox persons with

heterodox persons, to restrict the ability of heterodox persons to transmit their property at the expense of their orthodox children, and to disqualify any testimony that heterodox persons might give against the orthodox in secular courts.¹²⁵ Once again, the decree is characterized as binding for the whole of the Chalcedonian oecumene:

... the matters which now concern us constitute an [authoritative] account not only for those in Melitene, but for the orthodox world everywhere, and it is absolutely incumbent on those who wish to behave piously, that they should take the present decree as a straightforward and inflexible rule.¹²⁶

Finally, the decree is once again marked by the ubiquitous presence of a peculiar species of prophylactic argumentation. At one point, the document devotes nearly two pages of the 1911 edition to a detailed philological and philosophical argument intended to prevent the 31st canon of Laodicea's prohibition on marriage with "all the heretics" (*ou pantas*) from being misunderstood:

Now perhaps one of the simpler people, hearing "one ought not [to contract a marriage] with *all* the heretics," will think that the prescription does not forbid us to contract marriages with all of the heretics, but only with some [of the heretics], while permitting it with the rest of them; nothing of the sort is in the law's intention.¹²⁷

The argument that follows is memorably obtuse, mixing analysis of passages from the Septuagint forbidding adultery with Aristotelian logic-chopping of example premises, all to the end of demonstrating that the canon's use of the quantifier "not all" (*ou pas*) is semantically equivalent to "no one" (*oudeis*), concluding grandly

τῆς φύσεως, ὧν οὐδὲν ἡμᾶς μετόχους τῶν ἐν ἐπαγγελίαις καθίστησιν *Erlasse*, 10.

122 *Erlasse*, 28–42.

123 *Erlasse*, 28–30.

124 Οὐκοῦν τοῦτο Ἰωάννην τὸν θεοφιλέστατον μητροπολίτην Μελιτηνῆς εὗρεν ἐπινυστάζοντα ἢ μὴ πάσῃ δυνάμει πρὸς τὴν κατ' αὐτοῦ παράταξιν ὀπλιζόμενον; πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐπὶ τῆς χώρας παρὰ τοῦ θεοφιλοῦς τούτου ἀνδρὸς τετραυμάτισται, οὐκ ὀλίγα δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς βασιλίδος τῶν πόλεων συνοδικῶς κατηκόντισται. *Erlasse*, 29.

125 *Erlasse*, 30–42; see the summary treatment of Vest, *Geschichte*, 2:1249–52.

126 ... τὰ νῦν ἐστὶν ἡμῖν οὐ πρὸς τοὺς κατὰ Μελιτηνὴν μόνον ὁ λόγος ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸ πανταχοῦ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὀρθόδοξον, καὶ δεῖ πάντως τοὺς εὐσεβεῖν βουλομένους ὥσπερ εὐθεὶ τινὶ καὶ ἀπαρεγκλίτῳ κανόνι τῷ παρόντι κεχρησθαι συντάγματι. *Erlasse*, 30.

127 Τάχα τις τῶν ἀπλουστέρων ἀκούσας «οὐ δεῖ πρὸς πάντας» οἰήσεται μὴ πρὸς πάντας αἰρετικούς τὰς ἐπιγαμίας ἡμῖν τὴν διάταξιν ἀποκλείειν ἀλλὰ πρὸς τινὰς, πρὸς δὲ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἀνιέναι οὐδὲν δὲ τοιοῦτον ἔνεστι τῷ τοῦ κανόνος σκοπῷ. *Erlasse*, 32.

with the statement, “For it is no more possible for a lawful marriage to be contracted between persons who do not agree in their confession concerning the divine, than it is for one of human nature to flap their wings.”¹²⁸

Who is this rhetoric targeting, if anyone? We have a suggestive comparison ready to hand in the form of the *Peira* of Eustathios Romaïos, the *droungarios tēs biglas* in the 1030s. The *Peira* represents our only existing insight into Byzantine case law.¹²⁹ In Eustathios Rhomaïos, we frequently see contradictions within the normative law codes invoked as the occasion for a pronouncement of *oikonomia*, the principle of “dispensation” by which verdicts and sentences were softened or modulated. Chitwood has recently given a useful précis of what seems to have been the most common use of the term in the Byzantine legal tradition:

Essentially, a judge could invoke *oikonomia* when confronted with a legal contradiction or impasse: two contradictory laws, say, or an unduly harsh penalty. *Oikonomia* allowed the judge to find some sort of accommodation: in the case of the two contradictory laws, by picking provisions from each which would allow him to reach a verdict, or, in the case of the unduly harsh penalty, by arbitrarily reducing it to something that seemed more reasonable.¹³⁰

The primary targets of this decree, I would argue, are provincial judges, existing along a very broad spectrum of legal knowledge, some of whom are using loose wording or ostensible contradictions in the normative legislation as the occasion for a pronouncement

of *oikonomia*. While our evidence for the capital typically sees this concept invoked to soften sentences, in the case of Melitene it would not be surprising to discover that it was invoked as an excuse to not enforce the laws concerning heresy at all. In fact, the decree’s peroration seems squarely aimed at compromising provincial judges like John Chrysoberges, opening with the rhetorical question, “Why then, do the judges indulge themselves in that which the law does not permit them?”¹³¹

Why indeed? In truth, it seems obvious that men like Chrysoberges, mindful above all of the fiscal duties with which they were also entrusted, simply wished to allow the profitable intermarriage and business dealings of prominent Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian citizens of Melitene to continue unimpeded.¹³² This grows even more plausible when we note that the patriarchal decree seems especially concerned with high-status unions, as opposed to low-status ones (which were probably both common and impossible to prevent). This stands out most clearly in the conclusion of the decree’s discourse on marriage:

Therefore, it clearly follows and is in agreement [with the canons], that even if such a wedding is attended by promises of betrothal, and pledges of earnest have been given, and contracts have been exchanged, and whether the contracting parties were ignorant of the difference of worship or were in the know, the agreement shall be void, and the contracts without power, and it shall be possible to withdraw from such agreements without any punishment whatsoever.¹³³

Angeliki Laiou has raised doubts that there was by this time any gap between betrothal and marriage in the unions of the lower classes, positing that betrothal, marriage, and conveyance of dowry were concluded on

128 Οὐκ εἰσελεύσῃ φησὶ πρὸς πάντα οἰκεῖον σαρκὸς σου ἀποκαλύψαι ἀσχημοσύνην αὐτοῦ [...] «οὐ πᾶς ἄνθρωπος ἵπταται» [...] γάμον γὰρ ἔννομον μεταξὺ συστήναι τῶν μὴ τὴν αὐτὴν περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ δόξαν ὁμολογούντων οὐδὲν ἥττον ἀδύνατον ἢ τὸ φύσιν ἀνθρωπίνην πετεῦξασθαι. *Erlasse*, 32–33.

129 The standard introduction remains the slim volume of D. Simon, *Rechtsfindung am byzantinischen Reichsgericht* (Frankfurt am Main, 1973).

130 Chitwood, *Byzantine Legal Culture*, 89; significantly, the principle could also be invoked in theological contexts, where its use was structured by a dialectical tension with *akribeia*: G. Dagron, “La règle et l’exception: Analyse de la notion d’économie,” in *Religieuse Deviance: Untersuchungen zu sozialen, rechtlichen und theologischen Reaktionen auf religiöse Abweichung im westlichen und östlichen Mittelalter*, ed. D. Simon (Frankfurt, 1990), 1–18. I am indebted to Phil Booth for this reference.

131 Τίνας οὖν ἔνεκεν, ὅπερ αὐτοῖς ὁ νόμος οὐ δίδωσι, τοῦτο χαρίζονται δικασταί; *Erlasse*, 40.

132 Holmes, “How the East,” 55.

133 “Ἐπεται δὲ δηλαδὴ καὶ κεῖνο συνομολογεῖσθαι, ὥς εἰ καὶ μνηστείας ἐπὶ τοιούτῳ γάμῳ σύμφωνα παρακολουθήσαιν καὶ ἀρραβῶνες δοθεῖεν καὶ ἐπερωτήσεις παρεντεθεῖεν, εἴτε ἡγνόουν οἱ συναλλάσσοντες τὴν τῆς θρησκείας ἑτερότητα εἴτε καὶ ᾔδεσαν, ἄχρηστοι μὲν αἱ συναινέσεις, ἀνίσχυροι δὲ καὶ αἱ ἐπερωτήσεις, καὶ ἔξεστι δίχα πάσης ποιότητος τῶν τοιούτων συμφῶνων ἀναχωρεῖν. *Erlasse*, 34–35.

the same day.¹³⁴ However, among the Chalcedonian upper classes we have evidence for sophisticated prenuptial contracts involving the purchasing of titles, the exchange of earnest money, and the inclusion of penalties for breaking the engagement. Detailed evidence exists of one agreement, in the form of the court memorandum of a case involving Michael Psellos and his adoptive daughter. Having discovered that the fiancé he had chosen for her, one Elpidios Kenchres, was an incorrigible cad, Psellos broke off the engagement, and for all his considerable influence was forced to pay a remarkable (though perhaps nominal) penalty of fifteen pounds of gold.¹³⁵ This ruling thus seems squarely aimed at the financial and marital strategies of wealthy Syrian Orthodox laymen like the clan of Abū ʿImrān. It would not be surprising to find that they had few qualms about intermarriage with their wealthy Chalcedonian counterparts, in much the same way that the Constantinopolitan power elite had few qualms about intermarrying with the Latin aristocracies during the thirteenth century.¹³⁶ Alas, the attitudes and practices of wealthy Syrian Orthodox laymen are almost entirely lost to us. We may note in passing that while the 794 synod of the Syrian Orthodox patriarch Cyriacus forbade laymen from giving their daughters to Nestorians, Chalcedonians, or Julianists, the synod of Patriarch Gīwargīs in 1096 mentions only pagans, Muslims, and Nestorians.¹³⁷

But given the clerical and monastic domination of the Syrian Orthodox historical tradition, we cannot go further than this, and are once again thrown back on indirect evidence for interconfessional unions,

provided by those who sought to destroy them. Yet while our evidence may be indirect, when taken as a body it sheds a great deal of light on the mixed society that must have existed in Melitene. According to the Syriac *vita* of Bar Abdún, when the Chalcedonian authorities finally took him for the spring journey to the capital, the entire population of the city lamented his passing:

And not only our people mourned his departure, but especially the Armenians as well, and those Greek Chalcedonians who were in the city were weeping, and crowding in to receive blessings from his holy hands. And everyone predicted that God's great wrath would come upon the kingdom of the Romans. And so it came to pass.¹³⁸

Conclusion

Over the course of this paper, I have established a new narrative for the history of the Syrian Orthodox in Melitene from 934 to 1039. The key conclusion of this new narrative is that far from being marginal, Byzantine Melitene was central to the political economy of the tenth- and eleventh-century empire. Imperial policy was deeply invested in harnessing the fiscal power of this confessionally heterogenous and economically vibrant society, in which the contributions of the Syrian Orthodox were decisive. The prosperous exuberance of Byzantine Melitene also laid the foundation for the literary incandescence of the Syriac Renaissance, as Syrian Orthodox cultural life came to depend on the wealth of Melitene to underwrite its many achievements.

The central pillars of this new narrative were built up in three stages. In the first stage, I used Michael the Syrian's *Chronicle*, combined with an Arabic synodical letter written by the Syrian Orthodox patriarch Yûḥanān VII Sṛigteh, to deconstruct the old narrative of Syrian Orthodox origins in Melitene. The old narrative emerged from the work of Gilbert Dagron, who

134 A. E. Laiou, "Consensus Facit Nuptias—Et Non: Pope Nicholas I's *Responsa* to the Bulgarians as a Source for Byzantine Marriage Customs," *RJ* 4 (1985): 189–201.

135 D. Jenkins, "The Court Memorandum (hypomnēma) regarding the Engagement of His Daughter," in *Mothers and Sons, Fathers and Daughters: The Byzantine Family of Michael Psellos*, ed. A. Kaldellis (Notre Dame, 2006), 139–56.

136 D. M. Nicol, "Mixed Marriages in Byzantium in the Thirteenth Century," *Studies in Church History* 1 (1964): 160–72. For more textured and recent pictures of the larger landscape of elite kinship and marriage, see F. Van Tricht, *The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium: The Empire of Constantinople (1204–1228)* (Leiden, 2011), 251–306; N. Leidholm, *Elite Byzantine Kinship: ca. 950–1204: Blood, Reputation, and the Genos* (York, 2019), 137–61.

137 A. Vööbus, ed. and trans., *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, 4 vols. (Leuven, 1976); CSCO 375, 10; 4 [trans. in] CSCO 376, 12; 5.

[illegible]

placed the origins of the Syrian Orthodox efflorescence in the city during the reign of Nikephoros Phokas. The central contention of Dagron's narrative is that the true beginning of that efflorescence lay with an invitation from Nikephoros Phokas to Yūḥanān VII Srīgteh to move his residence to Melitene, and thereby encourage the Syrian Orthodox to help repopulate the region; as a condition of this arrangement, the Syrian Orthodox would receive a guarantee of tolerance from the emperor. For Dagron, this marked the beginning of an imperial policy that would last until 1029, which specified tolerance in Melitene and its environs, but intolerance in Antioch and its environs. A reexamination of the key primary sources, combined with the evidence of recent scholarship in both Syriac studies and Byzantine studies, undermined this narrative at its foundations. Most notably, a closer examination of Michael the Syrian's sources allowed us to highlight the role of Ignatius of Melitene, whose unique profile as a hellenophilic, imperial loyalist who nevertheless had personal experience of Chalcedonian persecution served as an index of Syrian Orthodox Melitene. Ignatius conveniently conflated a complex series of events in order to paint Syrian Orthodox Melitene as an imperial foundation that was legally guaranteed a protected status within the Chalcedonian Empire by the imperial seal. The shakiness of this story is underlined by the synodical letter of Yūḥanān VII Srīgteh at the time of his imprisonment by Nikephoros Phokas: he makes no mention of any such agreement. Consequently, the existing scholarly narrative of Nikephoros Phokas's "broken promise" does not have a firm basis. Once this interpretative obstacle is removed, the Syrian Orthodox immigration emerges as a much more extended process than was previously appreciated, and imperial policy looks less like a consistent "dual approach" and more like the unsteady alternation of benign neglect and sporadic persecution that characterized imperial policy toward the Miaphysites in the sixth to seventh century.¹³⁹ At this point in the argument, new developments in

the field of Byzantine studies allowed us to highlight the prominent role of men like the Arab Christian *basilikos* of Melitene Kulayb in the disrupted politics of the late tenth century, a role that depended on the fiscal power of Melitene and its environs. The politics of civil war were also implicated in the most important piece of evidence for a "persecuting policy" in Antioch, the persecutions ascribed to Patriarch Agapios II of Antioch. Agapios emerged as an opportunist operating with a high degree of autonomy during a period of civil war, after which he was quickly deposed on the orders of Constantinople. The dual-policy theory needs to be abandoned.

In the second stage of my argument, these insights opened the door to a more fruitful interpretation of the Syriac and Arabic vitae of the Syrian Orthodox patriarch of Antioch Yūḥanān VIII Bar Abdūn, preserved in the pages of Michael the Syrian's *Chronicle* and Michael of Tinnīs's section of the *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*. These vitae recount the trial, deposition, and exile of Bar Abdūn, the result of a dramatic change in imperial policy cosponsored by Emperor Romanos III Argyros and Patriarch Alexios the Studite. Without the obstacle posed by a prejudgment in favor of a "persecuting policy" in Antioch, the full depth of intra-Chalcedonian disagreement on the question of toleration for non-Chalcedonian populations becomes clear. High-profile secular officials in Antioch and Melitene enjoyed friendly relations with the highest levels of the Syrian Orthodox church hierarchy, and the *kouratōr* of Melitene John Chrysoberges went so far as to actively obstruct the attempts of emperor and patriarch to have Yūḥanān VIII Bar Abdūn arrested. The Syrian Orthodox patriarch, for his part, vigorously protested his loyalty to the emperor even in the face of extreme Chalcedonian hostility, a theme that resonated widely in the broader Miaphysite communion. Even the Studite patriarch of Antioch, Nicholas II, was opposed to this about-face in imperial policy, which had largely left the Syrian Orthodox community to its own devices during the reigns of John Tzimiskes and Basil II. While we cannot be sure, he may well have seen this as a preemptory gesture on an issue that the patriarchate of Antioch regarded as within its own sphere of influence. He and many of his subordinates refused to participate in the show trial of Yūḥanān VIII Bar Abdūn and his metropolitan

139 See the remarks of J. van Ginkel, "Persuasion and Persecution: Establishing Church Unity in the Sixth Century," in *All Those Nations. . . : Cultural Encounters within and with the Near East; Studies Presented to Hans Drijvers at the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday by Colleagues and Students*, ed. H. L. J. Vanstiphout with the assistance of W. J. van Bakkum, G. J. van Gelder, and G. J. Reinink (Groningen, 1999), 61–69; I am indebted to the suggestion of an anonymous peer reviewer for this reference.

bishops. The reversal of policy had occasioned a serious factional cleavage within the secular and ecclesiastical politics of the Chalcedonian Empire.

In the third and final stage of my argument, we saw how this debate is addressed (albeit indirectly) throughout the patriarchal decrees of Patriarch Alexios the Studite. Leaving aside the many tacit rebuttals and apologetic digressions that pepper the decrees, their most remarkable feature is a noticeable increase in the sophistication of the jurisprudential reasoning compared to what had come before. In the decree of May 1030, this reasoning is deployed in order to adjudicate the problem posed by a separate Syrian Orthodox clerical hierarchy, envisioning a program of conversion for Syrian Orthodox churchmen and their integration into the Chalcedonian hierarchy. This increase in jurisprudential sophistication was probably occasioned by the opposition of Nicholas II and his subordinates. As the persecution of the Syrian Orthodox continued into the later reign of Alexios the Studite, this emerging jurisprudential sophistication found new targets: the provincial judicial officials who stood in the way of the policy's application to the heterogeneous lay society of Melitene. In order to establish his case that judges must enforce the legislation against intermarriage, inheritance, and legal testimony between Chalcedonian and Syrian Orthodox persons, Alexios needed to demonstrate that the normative legislation was wholly self-consistent and left no room for *oikonomia*, a theme that dominates the decree he issued on this subject in September 1039.

How far did this Chalcedonian persecution succeed in achieving its objectives? On the evidence of the Syriac sources, not very far. The true golden age in Syriac letters lies in the eleventh to thirteenth century, based on the prosperity achieved in the late tenth and early eleventh century. It does not seem to have been substantially impeded by the sporadic persecuting initiatives of the Chalcedonian metropole. At several points in this paper we have remarked on the extent to which imperial relations with the Syrian Orthodox resemble those of the sixth to seventh century more than has previously been appreciated. This should tell us something. Scholarship on the Syrian Orthodox church in both the sixth- to seventh-century period and the tenth- to twelfth-century period has a tendency to compose extended threnodies for a doomed and forever deteriorating relationship. We should

listen to such threnodies with a critical ear. If we shelve our knowledge of the ultimate result, what is most remarkable about the relationship is how stable it manages to be under the surface tension of perpetual crisis. It is easy to assume that had the Arab, Turkish, or Frankish incursions not interposed themselves, the relationship would eventually have collapsed under its own weight absent any outside intervention. This is an assumption that is often shared by Greek Chalcedonian and Syrian Orthodox writers when they look back on earlier history after a rupture has already been effected by outside forces.

At the conclusion of his article, Dagron quotes an arresting passage on the deteriorating fortunes of the empire in this period, which appears both in Attaleiates's *History* and in Skylitzes Continuatus. Deliberately situated on the very eve of the disastrous Mantzikert campaign, the passage can easily be taken as an index of growing cultural introversion and suspicion of outside influence in eleventh-century Byzantine culture:

Therefore these reports filled us with great dejection, as we surmised that what had happened was a divine sign—the rage and anger of God—for not only our foes but the very elements seemed to war against us. For previously it seemed that such an onslaught and eruption of peoples, and the crippling of those under Roman rule, was God's anger against the heretics living in Iberia and Mesopotamia as far as Lycandus, and Melitene, and Armenia situated nearby, and those who revered the judaizing heresy of Nestorius and that of the headless ones [Syrian Orthodox]—for these lands are filled with such false belief.¹⁴⁰

140 Ταῦτα τοιγαροῦν ἐπιδηγηθέντα πολλὴν ἐνήκαν τὴν ἀθυμίαν ἡμῖν λογιζόμενοι θεοσημίαν εἶναι τὸ γεγονός καὶ μὴν καὶ χόλον Θεοῦ, ὥς μὴ μόνον τῶν πολεμίων, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν στοιχείων ἀντιμαχομένων ἡμῖν. Πρότερον μὲν γὰρ ἡ τοσαύτη τῶν ἐθνῶν ὀρμὴ καὶ ἔπαρσις καὶ τῶν ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίους τελούντων κατακοπὴ ὀργὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐδόκει, κατὰ τῶν αἰρετικῶν δὲ οἱ τὴν Ἰβηρίαν καὶ Μεσοποταμίαν ἄχρι Λυκανδοῦ καὶ Μελιτηνῆς καὶ τὴν παρακειμένην οἰκοῦσιν Ἀρμενίαν καὶ οἱ τὴν ἰουδαϊκὴν τοῦ Νεστορίου καὶ τὴν τῶν Ἀκεφάλων θρησκείουσιν αἵρεσιν· καὶ γὰρ πλήθουσιν αἶδε αἱ χώραι τῆς τοιαύτης κακοδοξίας. Skylitzes Continuatus, *Chronicle* (E. T. Tsolakes, ed., *Ἡ συνέχεια τῆς χρονογραφίας τοῦ Ἰωάννου Σκυλίτση* [Thessalonike, 1968], 140–41) (hereafter, Skylitzes Continuatus); Dagron, “L’immigration syrienne,” 213–4. On the authorship of this continuation to Skylitzes's *Synopsis*

writing was already on the wall, as Melitene would find itself subject to recurrent raids and sieges in the years to come—switching hands between Byzantines, Turks, and Mamlukes.¹⁵¹ When Michael was writing, it was still possible to apply a positive gloss to the end of Byzantine rule and the advent of Turkish dominion. His anecdote about the clan of Abū 'Imrān ends on a rather upbeat note: “These few things we have written down, from among the many things which are said about them, that all who read it might praise God, and pray on their behalf.”¹⁵² But the same anecdote reappears, almost word for word, in the thirteenth-century

(Cambridge, MA, 2019), 252–58. I am inclined to believe that many of the notables dispatched by Constantine Doukas had at least begun to “aspire to Romanness”; *ibid.*, 37.

151 See Vest, *Geschichte*, 2:1316–1726.

152 ܡܝܚܐ ܕܥܠܝܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܠܝܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ
Michael the Syrian, §63 = Chabot 4:560; [trans.]
3:146; my translation differs from that of Chabot, as my reading
of the Edessa–Aleppo Codex has led me to believe that the scribe

chronicle of Bar Hebraeus, a native of Melitene who was later appointed maphrian in the city whence the Bnay Abū 'Imrān had originally emigrated: Tikrit. But here it is provided with a different conclusion: "We have written down these few things, that it might be known how prosperous this people of ours once were, and to what wretchedness they have been reduced in [this] generation."¹⁵³

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whom Chabot employed misread “هــلا” as “هــلا” (an easy mistake to make in the Serto script).

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